

# HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2010

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

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

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



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# FOREWORD

By David Mathews

As noted in previous issues of the *Exchange*, one of Kettering's most surprising discoveries has been the emergence of campus centers that are bringing a distinctive concept of democracy to the civic engagement movement in higher education. Because their names vary, we are now using "centers for public life" as a common label. What makes these centers distinctive is the way they understand the public or citizenry and the role it plays in democracy. They treat citizens as active producers of public goods and not just political consumers, voters, and taxpayers. While we have published articles about these centers in earlier issues, we are now able to report in more depth on what we have learned from a year-long conversation with the centers.

First of all, we learned that the centers are evolving, and their number seems to be growing. Initially, there were 20, then 40, and now more than 50. Most began by helping citizens make more informed decisions on which policies would serve the best interest of all. They held forums on topics ranging from health care to the role of the United States in the world. They used issue books in the National Issues Forums (NIF) series to foster sound public judgment, even on controversial issues like race relations and abortion. Their objective was to create a stronger public voice; that is, a more inclusive voice that would balance the voices coming from disparate interest groups. Some centers have now gone on to bring the outcomes of their forums to the attention of officeholders.

In addition, the centers have learned that although deliberative decision making rarely ends in full agreement, it does help combat political polarization. In public deliberation, like deliberation in juries, people have to consider all of the evidence. And as they do, they come to understand why those with views different from their own think the way they do. This understanding can change the tenor of a political discussion, which is no small accomplishment in an era of hyperpartisan incivility.

One of the most important insights of the centers is that choice is at the heart of politics. Not only are there choices to be made about representatives, but also there are more basic choices about the names we give to problems and the options we will consider for



solving them. These are crucial decisions. The names we give problems may or may not reflect the things people consider valuable; if they don't, citizens are less likely to get involved. All of the options we need to consider may or may not get on the table, and they may or may not be presented fairly. Who gets to make the decision about what actions are to be taken or what policies will be adopted is crucial. The quality of life we have depends on sound judgments. Even after these choices have been made, there are others ahead. What resources will we commit? Who will be involved? How will we organize our efforts? And, most important, how will we go about evaluating our efforts? What is success?

Choices like these often present us with moral dilemmas. All political questions are about what *should be* done. That is, what is just or fair? What will protect the things we value most, such as our freedom? The extent to which citizens are involved in making choices determines how democratic a country is, and the degree to which those choices are sound goes a long way in determining how effective a democracy will be in solving its problems.

Although many centers began by addressing issues of nationwide importance like balancing economic protection with economic well-being, some have begun to frame local issues. That has particularly been the case in centers attached to community colleges or cooperative extension divisions at universities. Many local issues are divisive, such as selecting a site to dispose of trash. The centers work with communities to identify the things that are of greatest concern to citizens, the things they consider most valuable. Then, they help lay out three or four options for actions that follow from these concerns, with the pros and cons of each option fairly stated. This was what happened when the center at Ohio State helped Cincinnati neighborhoods come up with action plans for improving race relations.

In the 2001 issue of the *Exchange*, I described the work of the community-related centers as creating a "public-making space," in contrast to providing services or expertise. This public space is created when citizens give their own names to issues to reflect their experiences and what they value most, when all the options that should be considered fairly are presented, and when there are opportunities for citizens to weigh carefully the pros and cons of each option, to deliberate. The collective or public work of choice making done in



public spaces builds civic capacity in communities—the capacity that makes a community resilient when challenges arise. And, most important of all, their work melds individuals into a heterogeneous body politic—a public. Choice work, *deliberative* choice work, also opens the door to an expanded notion of democracy, a democracy people can practice every day.

And it is the power of this concept of democracy that attracts students to the centers. Service projects are useful and popular, but they don't necessarily expose undergraduates to underlying political problems. Advocacy groups, on the other hand, have a political problem in view as well as firm conviction about how to solve it, but some students are hesitant to get involved with them. The politics of deliberative decision making and action is appealing because it is relevant on and off campus. Students who have been exposed to it through centers or classrooms develop a stronger sense of themselves as political actors than those in regular undergraduate programs. This was documented in a four-year study done at Wake Forest University, which I mentioned in the 2008 *Higher Education Exchange*. Drawing from their book, *Speaking of Politics*, professors Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan report on a democracy fellows program that involved students joining forces with other people to solve common problems. The students had classroom instruction combined with practical experience in making collective decisions that led to action on campus and in the local community.

Recognizing that giving students experience with deliberative decision making can make citizenship more meaningful, several centers have ventured into civic education in secondary, and in a few cases middle, schools. They are filling an alarming vacuum in civic education. The qualities of good citizenship, such as social responsibility and the ability to work with others, are difficult to measure quantitatively through standardized tests. Consequently, civics has dropped out of the curriculum or has been watered down. The centers are responding, not just by restoring civics, but also by reforming it. To put citizens back into civics and to support teachers who believe that preparing citizens is one of the primary missions of schools, some centers have begun summer institutes to introduce deliberative democracy into the curriculum. They hope to replicate the results reported in the Wake Forest experiment.

Despite this and the other innovative projects of the centers, their campuses don't necessarily recognize them as part of their civic engagement initiatives. In a forthcoming book, *To Serve a Larger Purpose*, John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley do not find that the engagement movement has a strong sense of democratic purpose, despite calls for it in the 1999 Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University and the publications of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Academic institutions all claim to serve democracy, but they are usually referring to their assistance with problems that occur *within* a democratic society, like poverty, rather than the problems *intrinsic to* democracy itself, such as the sidelining of citizens. The civic engagement movement provides an opportunity to address these intrinsic problems, and the centers have the potential to engage them. (For more on these intrinsic problems, see the latest *Kettering Review*.)

In a new Kettering Foundation report, *Doing Democracy: How a Network of Grassroots Organizations Is Strengthening Community, Building Capacity, and Shaping a New Kind of Civic Education*, excerpted in this issue, Scott London identifies one of the most serious of the intrinsic problems we face; changes in our civic infrastructure that have left citizens with fewer vehicles for coming together to act in the interest of all. London cites converging trends that have eroded the rich lode of civic associations that once impressed Alexis de Tocqueville. "Once a nation of joiners," London worries, "we've become a nation out of joint, more disconnected from each other and from our communities than ever." Our inclination to seek out others may or may not have changed, but the organizations that once brought us together have. They are now more function- than place-based, London argues, and they provide fewer opportunities for citizens to participate because the work they once did is now carried out by professional staff. Today's organizations act on behalf of the public but not necessarily directly with the public. They are more inclined to engage people in implementing their programs than bringing them together to "discover common purpose and work toward common goals."

Could it be, we wonder, that some of the centers might evolve into a new form of civic association that is campus-based? Could

they become places where citizens join in common purpose on agendas they set for themselves? Certainly the centers are growing and changing. And they are attracting faculty who want to combine their academic careers with a public life. What centers may eventually become is an open question. They are small, with shoestring budgets and limited institutional recognition. Still, their potential to serve democracy is enormous, as the following essays and interview illustrate.

# BEYOND CIVICS AND SERVICE: Expanding the Boundaries of Education for Democracy

By Scott London

When Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States in the 1830s and 1840s, he marveled at Americans' propensity for civic participation. "Americans of all ages, all conditions and all dispositions constantly form associations," he famously wrote. In France, social movements were mobilized by the government; in England, by the nobility; but in America, the *people* banded together and formed an association.

What was distinctive about these civic organizations, Tocqueville observed, was not just how numerous and variegated they were, but how they embodied what he saw as a unique and distinctly American understanding of democracy. Associations were the means by which Americans acted together in pursuit of their common goals and aspirations. They were carriers of what he called "habits of the heart"—the essential beliefs and practices that shape our character as democratic citizens.

For over two centuries, this idea has been deeply rooted in our national psyche. To many Americans, the word *democracy* still conjures up images of barn raisings and bake sales, of town meetings and gatherings on the village green. Yet studies show that the country has been moving away from this ideal in recent decades. Civic participation has dropped precipitously, membership in associations is on the wane, and our penchant for "prosecuting great undertakings in common," as Tocqueville put it, is not what it used to be.

Today, more and more of the activities once carried out by citizens have been taken over by professional nonprofits such as interest groups, watchdog organizations, and social service providers—entities that act on behalf of the public, but often without any direct public involvement. While they define what they do in terms of the needs and interests of their communities, the focus tends to be on implementing programs, delivering services, and representing constituencies, not—as Tocqueville and others observed in the early days of the republic—bringing people together to discover common purpose and work toward common goals.

This shift has effectively sidelined many Americans from active participation in public life. Functions once performed by citizens have been taken over by experts who speak in their name and organizations that act in their interest. “Rarely have we felt so powerless,” the National Commission on Civic Renewal summarized in a report some years ago. “In a time that cries out for civic action, we are in danger of becoming a nation of spectators.”

Despite these worrisome developments, and partly in response to them, there is a growing effort across the country aimed at reversing current trends and mending the social fabric. The movement—if one can call it that—draws from a wide range of promising grassroots activities, including creative community-building practices, breakthrough academic research, boundary-spanning visioning projects, unique public-private partnerships, collective resource management systems, and innovative policymaking approaches at every level of government.

At the center of the renewal effort is a burgeoning network of organizations variously called public policy institutes or centers for civic life. While it is a highly diversified group, the organizations share a common methodology, one aimed at tackling tough public issues, revitalizing communities, and strengthening people’s capacities to participate and make common cause. The centers are all founded on the notion that democracy is more than simply a system of government; it’s a means by which people act together in pursuit of their common goals and aspirations. To function effectively, a democracy has to be embodied not only in public institutions but also in the everyday practices of its citizens.

Today, there are more than 50 of these centers operating in almost every state in the union, most of them affiliated with institutions of higher learning. They combine the best of what colleges and universities provide—civics courses, leadership development, service-learning programs, community-based research—with the kinds of hands-on, collaborative problem solving traditionally carried out by nongovernmental organizations.

Because most of the centers are hybrids—part academic program and part NGO—they have managed to avoid some of the trappings of traditional academic institutes, on the one hand, and conventional community organizations on the other. For example, they

*The centers' activities represent a promising alternative to traditional forms of citizenship education.*

have largely sidestepped the problems of professionalization and accountability that have dogged many nonprofit organizations in recent years. A good number have also maintained a certain autonomy from the academic functions of their host institutions. This independence has allowed them to explore new approaches to civic education that are innovative, perhaps even groundbreaking, in American higher education.

The centers are pushing the boundaries in a number of ways: they emphasize the importance of public work and community problem solving as the cornerstone of an education for democracy, as distinct from mere civics instruction or service-learning; they are deepening and enriching scholarship by addressing its vital public dimension; they are bringing dialogue and deliberation into the classroom; and they are fostering a more democratic culture on college and university campuses.

At many institutions, the centers' activities represent a promising alternative to traditional forms of citizenship education. The work is carried out in public squares, community centers, and neighborhood associations, not behind campus walls. It also goes beyond traditional outreach and engagement efforts by emphasizing the importance of collaborative public work where academic institutions work closely with communities in ways that can benefit and strengthen both.

Rindge, New Hampshire, is a picturesque town of about 6,000 people. With its clapboard houses, white-steepled colonial churches and expansive town greens, it's a prototypical New England community. But for all its history and small-town charm, Rindge faces an uncertain future. A swelling population that has increased sevenfold over the last two generations, coupled with deepening divisions about whether to protect the town's historic heritage or promote commercial expansion, have stirred up a heated debate about how to go forward.

Some years ago, Douglas Challenger and Joni Doherty at Franklin Pierce University's New England Center for Civic Life brought together community leaders to tackle the issue head-on. What Rindge needed, they believed, was a way for people to come together, explore the perils and possibilities ahead, and

work toward some common goals. But it would take more than an old-fashioned town meeting and more than just another community plan.

As a first step, they assembled a 20-member steering committee jointly led by local residents, town officials, and fellow faculty mem-



bers. Then they carried out an extensive survey to assess where the community stood on a range of priorities for the future. But unlike so many community visioning projects, the process didn't end there. The survey was a crucial component, but it could only take the project so far. It could map people's individual preferences, but it couldn't help them arrive at a common understanding of the values and aspirations of the town as a whole.

To discover that, they would need to come together to deliberate about the pros and cons of various scenarios for Rindge's future. The deliberative forums were time-consuming but also deeply rewarding for many in the community. The conversations brought people together, strengthened ties between local organizations, and forged some new programs and initiatives. It also led to some key decisions, including the hiring of a new town planner, the launching of a local periodical, and the purchase of an aquifer for the benefit of the community.

The project was groundbreaking. It was the first time the community had come together to not only voice opinions but actually hammer out a set of concrete plans for the town's future. For Challenger and Doherty, the process was also rewarding from an academic standpoint. It involved their students in what they describe as "problem-based service-learning." It illuminated what scientifically generated facts and expertise can and can't do in the realm of public decision making. And it allowed the college to extend its reach into the community to contribute resources and expertise in a uniquely collaborative and participatory way.



The New England Center for Civic Life is one of a growing number of organizations across the country carrying out these kinds of civic renewal efforts. At the University of Michigan, for example, the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good uses deliberative dialogue to strengthen the link between citizens at the community level and regional and state policymakers. The Center for Civic Participation at Maricopa Community Colleges works with leaders from Hispanic, black, Native American, and other traditionally underserved communities to ensure they have a greater voice in regional and state policy discussions. The Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy at Kansas State University partners with other organizations across the state to make sure policy discussions on issues like immigration, land-use reform, healthcare, and energy policy reflect the public voice.

Ultimately the goal of all the centers is to build and strengthen communities from the ground up. But they go about that mission in different ways. Some strive to empower individuals by giving them the tools and frameworks to engage and make a difference, some seek to shape public policy, some work to build trust and reinforce social bonds, and some help communities take matters into their own hands and engage in real-world problem solving.



A few years ago, a center based at Virginia Tech began working with the small town of Wytheville, Virginia, on a project that illustrates the community development approach. Sometimes referred to as the “Crossroads of the Blue Ridge,” Wytheville was debating whether to divide and relocate two major highways. Over the course of three years, the center helped the community not only to resolve the highway dispute but to develop an overarching vision for the town’s future. With the help of graduate students, the center first conducted interviews and research in Wytheville. It then spent six weeks working with local leaders to create a framework for communitywide deliberation. This was followed by a year-long series of public

dialogues where the people of Wytheville systematically examined several potential scenarios for the town's future. On the basis of these deliberations, the center then helped the community develop a long-term vision statement and move toward concerted action.

According to institute director Larkin Dudley, it was "incredible to see the evolution and broadening of the community's focus from a narrow, immediate question of road relocation to a larger question of the future of the community." It was also a powerful example of what happens when people in a community change from asking what their leaders can do for them to asking what they can do for themselves, Dudley says. The shift in the discussion allowed the group to develop new lines of thinking and to imagine a new set of possibilities.

In communities across the country, centers are bringing people and organizations together in this way to *collectively* define the issues, search for workable solutions, and then put them into play. This approach distinguishes their work from conventional "engagement initiatives" and "community partnerships" where the different parties come to the work with their own preestablished goals or agendas. The centers work with communities to discover group purpose, not aggregate the interests of everyone involved. The work grows out of a systemic approach to community-building, one that recognizes that you can't deal with specific problems without also dealing with the connections among and between them.

"Civic engagement" has become a catchphrase on college and university campuses across the country over the last decade. Much is made of "preparing students for responsible citizenship," "developing future leaders," and "inculcating civic values." But for all the talk about higher education as a public good, the academy's commitment has been mostly limited to civics instruction and service-learning. It's not that students don't benefit from learning about government or from serving others, rather that these pedagogies too often take the place of hands-on experience tackling issues and solving problems in the community.

The work of the centers differs from conventional civics curricula or service-learning programs, which are oriented primarily at undergraduates. It also differs from traditional campus-community

partnerships and collaboratives, in which institutions confer knowledge and resources on behalf of others. The centers' activities are aimed at fostering essential democratic practices and grounding them in public work carried out *with* and *as part of* the community.

They bring people together, identify issues, convene deliberative conversations, and promote

collective action to bring about real social change. This is a model of citizenship education that revolves around democratic problem solving, not simply inculcating civic values or "doing good" in the community.



The centers are also reshaping citizenship education by pushing the boundaries of

scholarship. Traditional academic research presents a difficult challenge for those working to build communities and strengthen democratic practices. What works in higher education does not necessarily work in public life. In the academy, knowledge is valued to the extent that it makes an original contribution to its given field or discipline. In the public sphere, by contrast, knowledge is valued to the extent that it advances specific *public* ends. The two forms of knowledge are not mutually exclusive, but many of the problems of public life are not technical in nature and therefore can't be solved by expert knowledge. They are not based on conflicting information so much as conflicting values and convictions.

Through the work of the centers, scholars at a growing number of institutions are exploring new ways to deepen and enrich their disciplines by drawing on public knowledge—knowledge based on group inquiry and public deliberation. When done well, they say, it not only advances their scholarship but also serves the broader needs of the community. The centers offer an ideal laboratory for public scholarship of this sort by allowing faculty to explore the broader civic dimensions of their research.

A further way the centers are reinventing civic education is by bringing deliberative dialogue into the classroom. "If you look at a lot of classroom activities," says Richard Dubanoski, dean of the College of Social Sciences at the University of Hawaii, "we have

an expert lecturing the students. We don't engage them in the conversation, in active learning, or in any kind of critical thinking." Participating in one-time deliberative discussions on specific issues may not transform a student's learning experience, he says, but the practice of deliberation is very powerful when it becomes part of an ongoing process of inquiry. "If students are having continual experiences from the time they come to the university until the time they leave, there is a chance they will take on the habit of deliberating."

Some centers have also partnered with academic departments to create "schools for democracy"—opportunities for students to live and work together as citizens. Larkin Dudley at Virginia Tech sees this as part of a growing movement, particularly at large research universities, aimed at developing "learning communities" where students can share ideas and work together to achieve common learning objectives. "It's an attempt to find alternative ways of creating community," she says.

There is no easy way to measure the outcomes of the centers' work over the past two decades. Even if it were possible to sum up the quantitative data—the growing ranks of institute alumni, for example, or the rate of growth of the network as a whole—the real value of the work would not be reflected in the numbers.

Institute leaders routinely caution against searching for hard evidence of impact. The most powerful outcomes are the most difficult to quantify because they involve democratic norms and capacities that are intangible, says Charles Lacy, retired director of a center at University of California Davis. "If you can tell strong stories," he adds, "that is probably the closest you can come."

Even so, the evidence—especially when examined as a whole—constitutes more than just good stories. It suggests that the centers' efforts have contributed to a range of public goods. Thanks to careful documentation and, in a few cases, independent evaluations, the centers can be shown to have directly or indirectly increased voter turnout, heightened civic participation, strengthened civic capacity, deepened trust and mutual understanding, spanned social, political and economic boundaries, reached out to traditionally underrepresented populations, brought an end to stalemates on

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intractable issues, influenced public attitudes, and shaped public policy.

There is also some evidence—less convincingly documented but supported by interviews and second-hand reports—suggesting that some centers’ programs have improved relationships between citizens and officials, enhanced decision making, expanded the responsiveness of local institutions such as government, business, and the media, and even created new institutional arrangements.

The big question facing the centers is whether the value of their work is adequately recognized and whether they will continue to get the support they need in coming years. Many of them are tied to colleges and universities that are cutting back and shifting their priorities to other pressing demands, such as expanding enrollment, accommodating diversity, or simply making financial ends meet. But if the centers can continue to document their successes and make a compelling case for their work, both individually and as a network, they are likely to have a significant and deepening influence in the years ahead — one that can enrich our public discourse, strengthen our social fabric, and shore up our capacity to govern ourselves as democratic citizens.

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*This essay was adapted from Doing Democracy: How a Network of Grassroots Organizations Is Strengthening Community, Building Capacity, and Shaping a New Kind of Civic Education, by Scott London (Kettering Foundation, 2010).*

# FACILITATING COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY FROM CAMPUS:

## Centers, Faculty, and Students as Key Resources of Passionate Impartiality

By Martín Carcasson

Democracy needs help. It has become exceedingly clear that self-regulation of the democratic marketplace of ideas is simply not working well in the 21st century. It has created too many inferior products, and those products have real effects. Far too much of the communication about public problems and solutions is not only ineffective in helping us address problems, but is actually counterproductive to democracy. Said differently, many of our current communication processes hamper our efforts to address the problems *in* democracy (poverty, crime, rising healthcare costs) as well as worsen many of the problems *of* democracy (polarization, cynicism, misunderstandings).

Our political discussions are dominated by adversarial communication that is primarily targeted to like-minded choirs or attempts to sway moderates. Such target audiences often invite and reward bad arguments and simplified claims that lead to greater polarization and distrust among the public. Rarely are political discussions designed to actually engage opposing views or struggle with competing and reasonably held values. There are simply very few places for citizens to work through the tough choices a diverse democracy inherently brings forth.

Communication from “experts” about public issues is limited in its own ways. In order to satisfy dominant assumptions concerning valid and rigorous research, value questions may be avoided and public knowledge and narratives discounted. Even though public problems are inherently interdisciplinary, researchers are often compartmentalized in academic silos that limit the applicability of their conclusions. Unfortunately, narrow research, read by a select few experts, is rewarded more than applied research designed to inform decision makers or the public. In other words, the two most dominant

forms of communication related to democracy and public problem solving—adversarial political communication and issue-oriented research—are insufficient in meeting the needs of our communities, and in important ways are actually counterproductive. Such a state of affairs is particularly troublesome because democracy requires productive interactions between experts, the public, and institutional decision makers in order to function well. As deliberative practitioners have discovered, such interactions are indeed possible, and not only lead to better, more sustainable and legitimate public decisions, but also tend to spark positive side effects that increase democratic capacity.

High-quality deliberative efforts positively impact both the problems *in* and the problems *of* democracy. The rub, of course, is that such efforts require significant capacity and nurturing. Hence, the primary argument of this essay: *in order to function well, democracy requires the assistance of impartial resources with significant capacity dedicated to making democracy work*. Such passionate and equipped impartiality, however, is exceedingly rare, and leads directly to the question of how our communities will develop and sustain these impartial resources. The answer I sketch out in this essay focuses on the growing number of campus-based centers and institutes dedicated to deliberative democracy and collaborative problem solving, as well as the faculty and students involved with them. These centers, many of which are either connected to the National Issues Forum network or the University Network for Collaborative Governance, hold significant potential to help fill this critical democratic gap.

## **The Case for Passionate Impartiality**

Passionate impartiality is not simply dull, detached neutrality, but an *engaged* impartiality that passionately supports democracy and the values it entails, such as freedom, equality, inclusion, transparency, trust, and mutual respect. Passionate impartiality acknowledges that democracy needs help to function well, and devotes significant time and resources toward fulfilling that function. As a communication scholar, I can focus on improving the quality of public communication concerning important public problems. I choose not to take particular sides on issues, but rather intently focus on how we communicate and how the processes we rely on to interact with others and



solve problems collaboratively can be improved. Passionate impartiality infuses many aspects of my work, including analyzing issues, convening, facilitating, and reporting.

There are many reasons why passionate impartiality is so critical, but here I will focus on two interrelated ones. The first is what I will term the “information problem,” which is caused by a combination of the proliferation of information sources in the 21st century, the increasing politicization of many academic and media sources, and the growing pluralism of our diverse communities. The marketplace of ideas, in other words, is very crowded, and it is more and more difficult to assess quality. Once again, the dominant voices are counterproductive. Any complicated issue has an almost unlimited number of points of evidence to support or refute particular positions. When opposing perspectives strategically select and frame the most persuasive arguments or attacks—and purposefully ignore the strongest counterarguments—increased misunderstanding and polarization is often the result, making collaborative decision making more difficult. Such poor results can occur even without advocates purposefully deceiving the public or manipulating data, which, unfortunately, is a common practice. Passionate impartiality can help. Simply put, the marketplace needs some regulation in order to serve the public better. Deliberative practitioners can play a role similar to *Consumer Reports*, which represents a commercial form of passionate impartiality. Such practitioners seek not to support any particular view, but rather to focus on clearly laying out the options faced by the public. Because it is difficult to acquire impartial information, this is certainly a difficult endeavor wrought with complications. It is nonetheless critical and worthy of significant effort.

The second primary argument for passionate impartiality focuses on the tradeoffs and tough choices inherent to public problems. As has been argued by David Mathews, Daniel Yankelovich, Michael Briand, Deborah Stone, and others who champion deliberative democracy, working through tough choices is the essence of democratic decision making. The problem is that neither of the dominant forms of communication about public problems—adversarial political communication or academic research on issues—handles these tough choices well. Academic research on public policy tends

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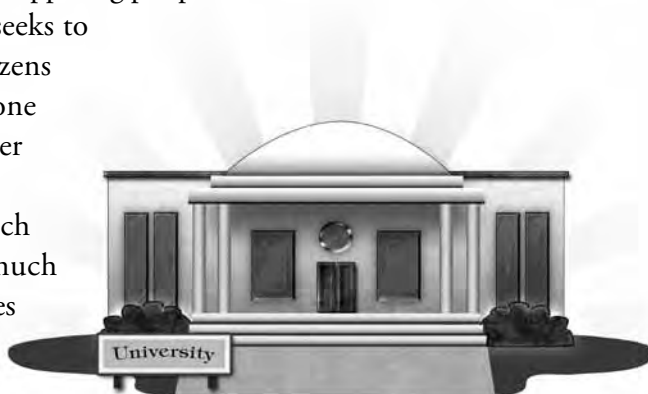
to avoid values and tough choices, primarily because they elude empirical analysis. Adversarial political communication tends to frame issues as if there were no tough choices—either one side has all the answers or the other side is corrupt or ignorant. Advocates frequently seek to narrow arguments so that only one value is relevant, such as national security, equality, or freedom. As a result, the public often develops skewed views, particularly concerning the motives underlying opposing perspectives. Without a clear conception of tough choices and competing values, opposing views are too often seen as supporting negative values (i.e., “I value national security, and *they* disagree with me, so they must oppose national security and support the terrorists”), rather than simply holding one reasonable value higher than another (i.e., “I value both national security and civil liberty, but national security is more important to me; *they* also value both, but hold civil liberty above national security”). In sum, because understanding and working through these tough choices is so critical to democracy and community problem solving, and since our current communication resources tend to ignore these processes, we must seek out alternative ways to help our communities face these tough choices. This is a key role for deliberative practitioners brimming with passionate impartiality.

Shifting away from the simplistic and strategic arguments that dominate our political landscape will be exceedingly difficult because of the strong adversarial forces that are heavily invested in them and because of basic human psychology: people tend to prefer the simplistic framing over the hard work of dealing with tradeoffs. But once again, the lessons of thousands of deliberative processes over the years provide evidence that there is a better way, and that communities can develop stronger habits. The question is how to bring these processes up to scale to provide a clear alternative to the dominant voices.

## **The Role of Colleges and Universities as Sources of Passionate Impartiality**

Passionate impartiality is, unfortunately, rather countercultural. There are certainly vast resources for adversarial democracy, including advocacy groups, political parties, partisan think tanks, public relations firms, and media organizations. These groups are

heavily invested in communication that builds support for their perspectives and sheds doubt on opposing perspectives. Deliberative practice, on the other hand, seeks to provide opportunities for citizens to productively engage with one another, appropriately consider expert information, and work through competing values. Such deliberations are obviously much more likely to occur if entities exist that focus on developing, supporting, and improving them. Currently, such entities are developing in a number of sectors, such as local governments, public libraries, for-profit companies, and local not-for-profit civic organizations. In addition, national organizations like National Issues Forum Institute, AmericaSpeaks, Public Agenda, Everyday Democracy, and Viewpoint Learning often seek to not only run high-quality deliberative processes, but to develop local capacity as well. Although all these various sources can contribute in important ways and should be nurtured, I argue here that the most promising and sustainable home for deliberative practice will be our colleges and universities.



Colleges and universities provide a number of natural connections and important advantages to efforts in deliberative democracy that can make them particularly supportive of passionate impartiality. In most cases, they hold a place of prestige in their communities, particularly when they are engaged with the community. They provide access to experts and skilled personnel in many different subject areas, as well as access to students. Other critical resources, such as meeting rooms, communication staff, and office supplies—all of which can represent significant expenses—can also be provided by the institution. A number of institutions of higher education, particularly land grant universities and community colleges, have specific missions that call upon them to help their communities solve problems. In addition, public institutions of higher learning, which are to some degree supported by public funds, should be nonpartisan. Most of the institutions have a number of

*The most promising and sustainable home for deliberative practice will be our colleges and universities.*

specific disciplines or institutional programs that have strong inherent connections to deliberative democracy, such as civic engagement offices, public policy institutes, and departments of political science, communication studies, or community development. Such entities should naturally support notions of passionate impartiality (though many do not). Building reputations for passionate impartiality may be particularly valuable for these institutions, especially considering the hyperpartisan nature of contemporary politics and the financial difficulties most states, and thus public colleges and universities, currently face. Deliberative practice provides these institutions with the opportunity to take on controversial local issues and show their value to their communities without having to “pick sides.”

Despite these important advantages, institutions of higher education also present a number of barriers to deliberative work. In many of our most prestigious universities, research dominates, teaching is secondary, and service enjoys very little respect. Deliberative work that focuses on service, and only occasionally connects to pedagogy or research, would be considered a low priority. As discussed earlier in this essay, college campuses are often rather compartmentalized, with individual silos doing specific work that is often disconnected from the community. Indeed, most academics are probably more engaged with national or international disciplinary communities than with their local geographic community. Enduring assumptions about the detached “ivory tower,” in other words, often have some credence.

In the end, however, I would still argue that colleges and universities remain our best bets for deliberative democracy particularly within the format of centers devoted to the work. While the pressures supporting detached scholarship will remain strong, the voices calling for colleges and universities to reengage their communities and break down the academic silos are growing louder. Centers devoted to deliberative work may be particularly appealing to those seeking ways to respond to these calls. Centers also represent a strong potential source for the institutionalization or embedding of deliberation in local communities, which is exceedingly important for expanding the movement. As these centers continue to develop, more dedicated positions will be established that allow professionals to commit significant time to deliberative

practice. Rather than having deliberative practice diffused across the campus, such centers can serve as hubs that help bring typically disconnected scholars and practitioners together, and can function as “front doors” for community members wanting to connect to campus.

## **Faculty and Students as Deliberative Practitioners**

As the work of the Democracy Imperative has shown, deliberative work can bring together multiple disciplines across campus. The Democracy Imperative is an organization focused on connecting higher education to the deliberative democracy movement. Clearly, personnel in a variety of positions have been engaged in deliberative efforts and have made important contributions, but faculty, particularly tenure-track faculty, offer some distinct advantages that are critical to growing deliberative democracy. When faculty members envision themselves as deliberative practitioners, they move beyond typical faculty expectations in important ways: they move beyond their traditional roles as experts and critics, and beyond the boxes of teaching, research, and service.

One of the traditional roles for faculty *if* they engage locally is serving as topic experts. Innumerable local panel discussions or public lectures have included faculty members presenting their particular points of view in order to increase the level of public understanding on the issues of the day. Faculty may also be asked by local media to hold forth on their areas of expertise. Such engagement can be valuable and productive, but is also limited. Utilized in this way, faculty generally do not directly contribute to the public’s ability to uncover and work through the tough choices inherent to democracy, and thus may simply add to the information overload already prevalent. The faculty member as topic expert too often fits the dominant, but flawed, paradigm that assumes that to address problems the public needs merely better information, not deliberation, public engagement, and judgment. Faculty involved in deliberative work, however, can move beyond the role of topic expert, and cultivate the role of *process* expert. At the same time, they make the work of other topic experts more valuable by providing a more productive framework for their contributions.

A second role that faculty tend to play when engaged with public issues is that of critics. Faculty members in a wide variety of disciplines focus their work on providing critical commentary on public issues. The degree to which such commentary significantly engages the community and contributes to deliberative democracy, however, varies widely for a number of reasons. It is too often rather insular, involving a conversation only among fellow academics. The topics are likely to be national or international in nature, rather than local, and the response is often reactive rather than proactive. Lastly, the critique frequently comes from particular ideological perspectives, and thus contributes more to adversarial democracy. Obviously, such critique can add important and necessary voices to the discussion, and can expose how certain voices may abuse their power to the detriment of the community, but these

critiques do not contribute to the specific needs of our democracy as outlined earlier. Such

critics may be particu-

larly skilled at *deconstructing* powerful messages, but tend not to focus as much on *reconstructing* messages and helping communities work together across differences to solve problems. Faculty involved in deliberative work, however, can move beyond the limits of critique, and make the work of the critics more valuable because of the improved overall communication framework they nurture.

A third way of being engaged in the type of deliberative work that can help faculty go beyond typical expectations involves transcending the “boxes” of teaching, research, and service. One of the clearest lessons I have learned over the past several years as I’ve established and directed the Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) is that the work takes considerable time and a very broad skill set. My position as a tenure-track communication professor has allowed me to dedicate significant time to the work. As is the case with most tenured or tenure-track faculty members, my job responsibilities are split between teaching, research, and service. It is typical for faculty at research institutions to have a 50/35/15 split respectively between these areas. Unfor-



unately for many faculty members, each responsibility is practically a separate realm. Their research areas may connect to their teaching, but often research is too specific to garner a dedicated course, and thus faculty teaching responsibilities range beyond their research interests. Service responsibilities may be met through service to the department, college, university, discipline, or community, and are often predominately fulfilled by serving on committees or reviewing papers for national conferences or journals; very little time is left for actual community engagement. As a deliberative scholar and practitioner, however, I am able to bring all three of my areas of responsibility into almost seamless coordination, and thus maximize the amount of time I can dedicate to deliberative work while still fulfilling my required responsibilities. Unlike faculty who may be practicing passionate impartiality as volunteers or as just one of many aspects to their job, I am essentially paid full-time to study and support deliberative democracy.

While there are a number of ways individuals can contribute to deliberative democracy from campus, tenure-track faculty are particularly well positioned to make an impact as deliberative researchers and practitioners. In doing so, they would help our colleges and universities respond to many critics who charge them with being too disconnected and insular, and help institutions reconfigure the civic mission of higher education to fit the needs of our diverse 21st century democracy. Such work could also enhance the relevance and influence of the work of their social science colleagues as well as their critics, and essentially serve as a stronger bridge between academic analysis and democratic decision making.

In ways similar to faculty, when students are put in positions to develop skills as deliberative practitioners, they gain significant personal benefit while they contribute to their community, often exceeding what is normally expected of students. In my experience at the CPD, I have seen that students can be a very strong asset to deliberative practice. Students often fit into the “passionate impartiality” role very well, particularly in terms of local issues that they may not have connected with yet as advocates. Many of my students have clearly come to understand the limits of adversarial tactics and the advantages of the deliberative perspective for community problem

*Students gain significant personal benefit while they contribute to their community.*



solving—lessons I believe they will carry with them throughout their lives. Community members are consistently amazed by the fact that not only are students *at* a public meeting, but they seem to be *running* it. The students' participation is also critical for very practical reasons. Deliberative practice requires the capacity to have numerous trained facilitators, particularly if you hope to break large crowds into smaller discussion groups. Finding 20-30 community members to serve as facilitators and notetakers for a large process would be very difficult, particularly since the most engaged community members would most likely already be connected to particular perspectives (again, passionate impartiality is a rare resource). Students can capably fill that need.

From the students' perspectives, they gain invaluable experience that goes beyond what is typically offered at their institutions. While students in general may engage with their communities, the manner and quality of that engagement varies, and is typically disconnected from the issues of modern democracy that *deliberative* democracy is designed to address. Students involved in service-learning, for example, frequently work with individual nonprofit organizations, and thus work from particular perspectives rather than across many. They are likely to work more on addressing symptoms and assisting with needs in the community, than serving as broader catalysts for systemic change. Campuses also offer many opportunities for students to gain experience in adversarial politics, such as student government, campus media, advocacy groups, or classes taught from particular ideological perspectives. Programs that introduce students to deliberative democracy, therefore, will likely provide new opportunities for students to complement existing programs.

Some may be concerned with the quality of the facilitation when students are the providers, but in my program, I have an application process that only brings in high-quality students, and they tend to stay for at least a full year. That gives me significant time to train them and build their skill set. How many facilitation training programs allow time for participants to work together over an entire year, with multiple opportunities for running actual events and reflecting on their work? In sum, it is clearly a win-win-win-win situation. The CPD wins because the students make our work possible; the students win because they gain valuable experience and

develop a much needed skill set; the community wins because it is provided with a greater capacity for deliberative practice; and the university wins because it clearly exhibits the value of its presence to the community.

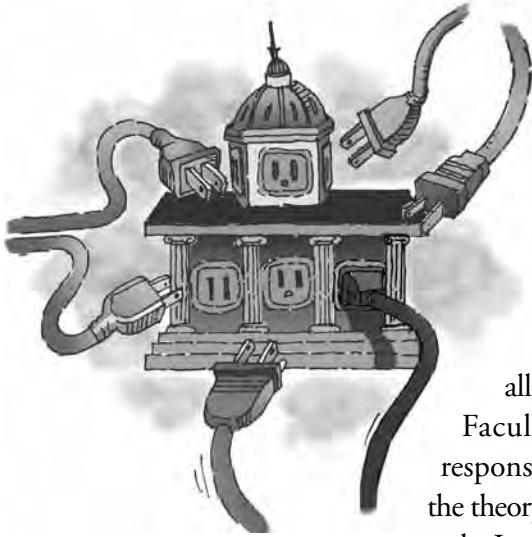
## **Conclusion: Keys to Moving Forward**

As the deliberative democracy movement continues to develop, building and sustaining local capacity will be critical for bringing it up to scale and providing viable countermeasures to the negative impacts of adversarial politics. As the diversity of our communities continues to increase and communication outlets proliferate, the information problem will worsen, and the tough choices inherent in public decision making will intensify. In this essay, I've argued that, despite some challenges, our colleges and universities are key resources in building local capacity, particularly with the unique resources and commitments that can be provided by faculty and students. When colleges and universities commit significant resources to deliberative practice, they provide strong responses to many of the criticisms of modern higher education, and actually strengthen the more traditional social scientific or critical work of faculty by providing a better environment for its consideration.

Unfortunately, only a handful of colleges or universities have centers dedicated to deliberative democracy, and at this point few of those centers rely on tenure-track faculty or students to the extent that the CPD does. Many of the centers connected to the NIF network, for example, are run by volunteers or personnel that direct the centers as only one—at times minor—aspect of their job descriptions. They are certainly doing wonderful work, but are simply limited in terms of the amount of time they can commit. Too often the work is connected solely to the university's service mission, and not the “core functions” of teaching and research.

Moving forward, I see three keys to increasing the impact our colleges and universities can make on deliberative democracy. First is the development of more centers and institutes dedicated to the work. Dedicated centers can serve as central hubs for the work that helps bring together interested, but disconnected, parties across campus. They can also serve as the “front door” for collaborative

*Our colleges and universities are key resources in building local capacity.*



problem solving for their institutions, which can be important when the community is unsure of how to connect to campus. Second, these centers benefit when they involve tenure-track faculty members. Doing so will significantly increase the likelihood of embedding deliberation in the institutions long-term, as well as connecting the work to all-important teaching and research missions.

Faculty with teaching, research, and service responsibilities can also do the vital work of bridging the theory-practice gap often evident in deliberative work. Lastly, students need to be involved in as

many aspects of the work as possible. Utilizing students not only benefits them, but also the centers, the universities, and the community, while building a new generation of advocates for deliberative practice. In the end, I reiterate that democracy needs help, and campus centers dedicated to deliberative democracy, assisted by passionately impartial faculty and students, could be essential to providing that assistance.

# THE RINDGE TINGE:

## Art, Dialogue, and Public Judgment

By Joni Doherty

For about a decade the New England Center for Civic Life has engaged students at Franklin Pierce University in democratic practices that include moderating and participating in deliberative forums. In addition to using the National Issues Forums (NIF) discussion guides on national and global topics, the Center's Civic Scholars, and faculty and students in a number of courses, have developed guides that address campus-based issues. Student interest has been highest when more local and immediate issues are the focus.

Although it is important to convene regular public conversations about local issues, especially in a community where there is an annual turnover of almost a quarter of the population, as educators at a liberal arts university we are also interested in enlarging our students' spheres of knowledge and engagement. Engaging students in deliberations about national or global concerns presents challenges that differ from those where participants are more directly impacted and experience the more immediate effects of the outcomes of deliberations. First, there is the challenge of educating and involving students in topics which may seem overwhelming or remote, or which do not resonate with their personal or academic interests. In order to bring together a cross-section of students from an array of academic programs, it is necessary to disseminate information about the topic outside of the classroom in ways that attract their attention. In addition, connections must be made between students' day-to-day lives and national or global issues. Successfully achieving these goals transforms students who may have been more narrowly focused on issues connected with their major into a "public" with diverse interests, backgrounds, and experiences who are interested in deliberating on an issue that extends beyond their immediate concerns.

In a time when the assessment of educational outcomes is of increasing importance, the next question is, "Is it possible to evaluate a well-considered judgment?" This, after all, is the goal of deliberation. Daniel Yankelovich, a social scientist and author, has developed a seven-stage model for tracking the movement from

*Students were at a state of pre-awareness ... few of them would have identified water as a social justice or environmental issue.*

public opinion to public judgment. The stages begin with awareness, move through a search for solutions, and conclude in a judgment founded on moral, emotional, and intellectual commitment. This model provides a means for tracking student awareness, knowledge, and judgment with regard to significant public issues. Although Yankelovich states that it can take the public ten years or more to move through all of the stages, I am going to use this framework to measure student response generated by *Art for Water at Franklin Pierce*, a year-long project that used art and dialogue to create diverse entry points for participation and opened up unconventional pathways for addressing a water-related environmental issue. As the semester progressed, students became aware of the ways in which local practices contributed to a global problem.

The Center for Civic Life invited Christine Destrempe, a local artist whose work addresses water-related concerns, to work collaboratively with faculty and students from various disciplines during the fall semester. Faculty were invited to integrate some aspect related to our public and private relationships to water into existing curriculum in whatever ways seemed appropriate for course goals. This allowed us to reach members of academic programs, including business, mass communications, and the visual and performing arts, who don't typically participate in our deliberative forums. A number of faculty members from core curriculum and humanities programs, who regularly integrate deliberative dialogue into their courses, also participated. Although not all of the students attended the cocurricular programs, including the forums, everyone did examine some aspect of the human relationship with water and, in the process, became increasingly aware of the importance of water in our lives. This awareness is the first stage described by Yankelovich, and is obviously essential in moving toward public judgment. Water is readily available here in the Northeast. For many, it is essentially invisible. In our case, it would be more accurate to say that most students were at a state of pre-awareness, since few of them would have identified water in general, and plastic-bottled water in particular, as a social justice or environmental issue.

When students first returned to campus in the fall, they were greeted with posters displaying water-related quotations in dorms, classroom buildings, the library, and the campus center. The quotes,

written by scientists, philosophers, poets, and athletes, were designed to invite reflection. Examples include “Our bodies are molded rivers,” “Water sustains all,” and “All the water that will ever be, is right now.” The tagline simply read “Art for Water.” The memorable quotations, coupled with an absence of information about the specifics of the program, sparked curiosity and generated anticipation. Next, announcements about *Art for Water* events appeared on the Franklin Pierce Intranet, on Facebook, and on a new set of posters. These weekly activities, fourteen in all, included roundtable discussions, deliberative forums, documentary films, and presentations by faculty, our visiting artist, and a curator. The programs explored water’s recreational uses (one faculty member shared photos and stories about his month-long journey on the Kazan River in northern Canada); its historical role (with a particular focus on Pearly Pond, which borders the campus on one side); social justice (which addressed questions like, Who owns water? Is access to clean water a human right or privilege?); and environmental concerns (a faculty member spoke about why she chose to become a wetlands ecologist).

After an informal pizza supper roundtable discussion in late September, the “Rindge Tinge,” although not (yet) identified as a problem, emerged as a common experience. Rindge Tinge is the name residents use to describe the iron-rich water in the town where the undergraduate campus is located. Since the water has a discernible taste and color, there’s an especially high rate of bottled water consumption locally. During these early discussions, most students didn’t see a problem with relying on bottled water, which is both cheap and readily available at a Walmart close to campus. However, about a third of the participants in the roundtable discussions had seen *Flow*, a documentary that investigates the growing privatization of the world’s dwindling fresh water supply. Approximately a quarter of the participants had attended a lecture by Destrempes about her recent work, which included *13,699*, an installation in which recycled water bottle caps represent the number of people who die every day from the lack of clean water. Students learned that it takes three liters of water to make one liter of bottled water, and that bottling plants may damage local aquifers, which can be a very serious problem in countries where clean drinking water is

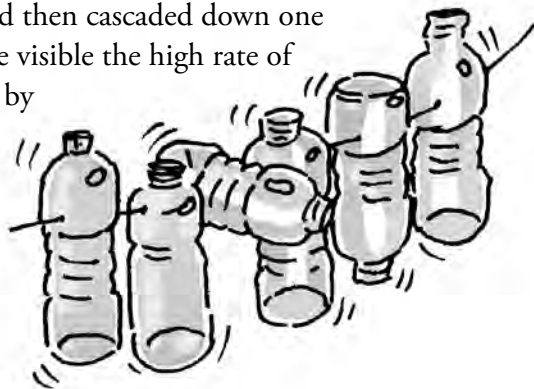
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scarce. Some had noticed that most plastic bottles used on campus aren't recycled, and began connecting that with problems related to landfills. Those students who had attended one or more of the cocurricular programs were developing an awareness that bottled water posed some significant environmental and societal problems. The more informed students shared what they had learned with their peers, but since everyone had strong opinions about the Ringe Tinge, it was clear that facts alone weren't going to change behaviors. We judged these discussions to be a success because students were now thinking and talking about a water-related issue. They were not yet deliberating about what to do, but they seemed to have a new appreciation for the value of water, which is something most of them had taken for granted. Just about everyone recognized that what they were doing on a personal level impacted the issue in ways that had global implications. In some ways these roundtable discussions functioned as the "personal stake" part of an NIF forum, where participants are asked to make personal connections with a public issue.

In courses where the issue was more thoroughly studied, students soon began calling for actions ranging from the installation of a campus-wide water filtration system (although the cost and feasibility of such a project had not been explored) to a prohibition of plastic water bottles on campus (without considering how that might be enforced). They had moved to stages two and three: they felt a sense of urgency and were demanding quick solutions. In his essay, "The Seven Stages of Public Opinion," Yankelovich writes, "Since people do not fully understand the choices presented to them, this stage is a period of stunningly false endorsements, that is, the public expresses support for a proposal but backs down as soon as the costs and trade-offs are clarified."

Following the roundtable discussions students in the Individual and Community Honors Seminar decided to make the water bottle issue visible by creating the *River of Consumption*, a room-sized installation of used plastic water bottles collected from the campus and the local elementary school. The process of stringing together hundreds of bottles with wire took most of the fall semester and generated plenty of interest during its construction. First of all, it seemed to be a very odd activity. In addition, the installation, with

its empty plastic bottles and colorful labels, was both beautiful and, because of the sheer number of bottles, disturbing. The piece served as the focal point for an interdisciplinary and multimedia celebration that was held late in November. The installation, which was strung across the ceiling and then cascaded down one wall and across the floor, literally made visible the high rate of consumption and the waste generated by it. The program included water-inspired dance, music, film, and storytelling. Students from Computer Music composed water-inspired soundscapes. Aspiring filmmakers in Media Production made short videos with subjects ranging from waste (a shower running while a student brushed his teeth) to appreciation (the joy of a shimmering glass of cold water after a hike in the woods). One longer video compared water running down the drain to the time one wastes in life by failing to recognize a problem and getting stuck, rather than acting decisively to address it. Illustration students reinterpreted a traditional Celtic tale about a water god. Our dance instructor choreographed a piece which used the student-composed soundscapes for the score and the water-bottle installation for the set. In the final scene a single dancer stands alone and pours water from a clear glass pitcher into a glass. The stage is dark except for the sparkling stream of water illuminated by a single beam of light.



In the spring, thanks to a grant from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, we were able to bring the performance to two community sites. We invited children from our local school district and residents and staff from Crotched Mountain Foundation, a rehabilitation center for individuals with brain injuries, to not only attend but also participate in the performances. At Crotched Mountain, the Adaptive Dance Program and the Drumming Circle accepted our invitation, and their projects were integrated into the program. One unexpected outcome was the opportunity for students and faculty to share what they had been working on with a larger public. In the spring, this public extended to include not only an audience, but also students and adults whose life experiences were



*Many faculty and staff were surprised by the extremely high consumption of bottled water.*

quite different from those of our undergraduate population. In the post-course evaluations, approximately 70 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that it was important for them to share their work with the community on and off campus.

The Civic Scholars, with assistance from some of the students in the Honors Seminar, developed an NIF-style discussion guide on the Rindge Tinge. Campus-wide forums were held in late October, after the project had been in full swing for two months. Students learned that there were differing attitudes and experiences about the Rindge Tinge. Although it was widely known by students, many faculty and staff were surprised by the extremely high consumption of bottled water. In addition, students noted that recycling bins were either absent or in inconvenient locations. One unexpected insight was that most employees had easy access to water coolers and recycling bins while students did not. For most administrators, faculty, and staff, the Rindge Tinge is not much of a concern; bottled water consumption is low, and recycling is easy. The opposite is true for students.

A notable number of students believed (falsely) that the water was unsafe to drink. Others didn't like the taste or color. Some said that their parents had advised them to drink only bottled water. In one course, students learned about the history of bottled water, and the powerful impact and persistence of personal taste. With regard to water, this is as much a cultural as a personal preference, and changes over time. Even the argument that the iron-rich Rindge Tinge had been considered medicinal in past centuries, and that as notable a person as John Adams had sought out "iron water" for its healthful benefits before he became president, failed to persuade. Insight into the historical and cultural factors that influence opinion helped some students to be more understanding of the perspectives of others. The students knew that personal choice, however "unreasonable" it seems to be, had to be taken into account along with the more objective considerations of cost and environmental impact.

In Yankelovich's framework, during stages four and five the public bounces back and forth between wishful thinking and weighing the choices. Both were apparent in participant comments and appeared in the post-forum questionnaires' results. While the

environmental damage caused by the consumption of plastic-bottled water was acknowledged by just about everyone present, the questionnaires revealed that most students did not want to reduce their consumption. Only 52 percent agreed that people should attempt to limit the amount of bottled water consumed and only 48 percent were willing to make caring for the environment a top priority if it meant a personal sacrifice would be involved. However, 94 percent of participants agreed that the university needs to do more to emphasize recycling. Students were at the stage where, as Yankelovich points out, people want to “have it all.” The emphasis on recycling clearly demonstrated that students cared about the environment and yet they did not want to make a significant change to their water consumption habits, even after becoming aware of the impact of plastic-bottled water. In a separate program, the Marketing Research class presented their findings on student attitudes toward bottled water consumption and recycling. This data exposed the gap between wishful thinking and action: while most students verbally supported recycling, the research indicated that few followed through.

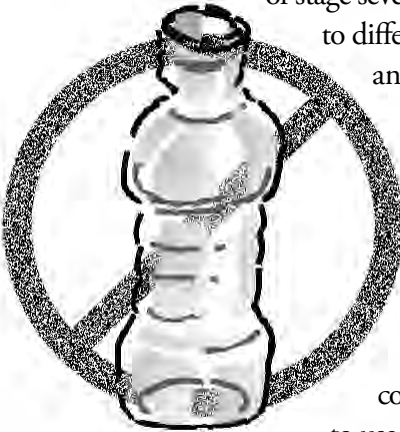
By the end of the fall semester, the majority of students moved from a state of pre-awareness to beginning to weigh various options for addressing this issue. While 83 percent of forum participants agreed that more needs to be done about the Rindge Tinge, they remained uncertain about what to do. Students were evenly divided in their support and opposition of a filtration system. Part of this opposition arises from financial concerns, since the cost of various options has not been determined (and neither has the cost of purchasing a year’s worth of bottled water). Others oppose it because they believe that the water is fine and that if individuals are unhappy with it they should be responsible for filtering their own water.

Participants who had attended several cocurricular programs and were enrolled in courses in which the issue was explicitly addressed in course readings and other assignments demonstrated a much higher awareness of the complexity of the issue and its broad societal impacts. Eighty percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am thinking differently about the way we, as a society, use water,” as compared with 31 percent of students who did not study

*Insight into the historical and cultural factors that influence opinion helped some students to be more understanding of the perspectives of others.*

the issue in class and/or who participated in fewer or no cocurricular programs. However, students whose sole exposure to the issue was through a sustained participation in an arts-based activity also had a heightened awareness of the issue. For example, the student dancers did not study the issue in a course and most didn't attend any of the cocurricular events. Although their only connection to the project was through their participation in the *Art for Water* celebration, 71 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were thinking differently about the way we, as a society, use water. The same number agreed that they better understood how the arts can be used to help people think more creatively about an issue.

A smaller number of students from the courses that were most deeply integrated into the project moved to the final stages of the public judgment model. As Yankelovich explains in the article mentioned earlier, this stage “requires people to clarify fuzzy thinking, reconcile inconsistencies, consider relevant facts and new realities, and grasp the full consequences of choices. The emotional resolution



of stage seven requires people to accommodate themselves to different situations, change their own thinking and behavior, and confront their own ambivalent feelings.” This shift is exemplified by the behavior of one student, who first committed to recycling water bottles and then, when she decided that did not address the root cause of the problem, began filtering her water and using a metal water bottle. She and her roommate are also maintaining recycling containers in her dorm for students who continue to use plastic-bottled water, a demonstration of both her commitment to the issue and her capacity to develop strategies that accommodate differing beliefs. Another student created a list of skills she had learned from the project for a class presentation. These included:

- look at problems in a more diverse way
- deliberate with others over important issues
- differentiate between propaganda and sharing opinion and
- pick out the important information in a challenging text.

The self-assessments of many students during these presentations included similar descriptions. These are the very skills needed to take an intellectual stand and arrive at a well-considered judgment.

In conclusion, let me return to the question posed at the start of this essay. Through creating a structure with a broad common concept—our personal and public relationship with water—and a flexible framework, faculty were able to integrate the project into courses in ways that were appropriate for their respective disciplines. This created the energy and awareness necessary for engaging students from an array of disciplines in a sustained exploration of a globally significant environmental issue. The use of traditional academic activities, such as reading texts and formal presentations, and unconventional strategies (which included building an art installation, pulling together interdisciplinary performances that showcased students' work, and having faculty share life experiences) raised interest in and awareness of this issue across campus and even extended to some degree into the wider community. While we were able to improve the extent to which students who participated in the forums acquired enough knowledge about the issue to form well-considered opinions, the questions were not fully resolved. Student commitment and knowledge varied significantly from individual to individual. It may also be true that some of the difficulty lies in the resistance described by Yankelovich in stage four: responses that appear to be superficial (and which we, as faculty, often attribute to a lack of knowledge) may actually express a reluctance to face costs and trade-offs.

While some of the project participants moved to the later stages of public judgment, most are still somewhere in the middle. At the same time, that crucial first stage—awareness—continues to expand. Approximately 200 college students, 260 public school children, a dozen faculty, and 90 community residents participated in the project. *Art for Water* also received prominent coverage in the local and campus press, further expanding the circle of awareness. Natalya Wayne, a mass communication major, made a documentary of the project for her senior project. The film was shown widely on campus and was featured at the Down:2: Earth Sustainable Living Expo at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston and posted on the university's website. A business faculty member who had heard

about the project from a colleague offered to do a filtration feasibility study with her students the spring semester. The Center for Civic Life has committed to developing a new project, *River of Words*, which will continue and extend the work begun with *Art for Water*. We have discovered that a creative mix of art and dialogue is an effective way to reach that crucial first stage of awareness. It also fosters student engagement in ways that enhance their capacity for crafting well-considered public judgments.

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# BRINGING THE GENERATIONS TOGETHER: An Interview with Michael D’Innocenzo

*David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with Michael D’Innocenzo, professor of history and The Harry H. Wachtel Distinguished Teaching Professor for the Study of Nonviolent Social Change at Hofstra University, and, in 2008, recipient of the Eugene Asher National Distinguished Teaching Award of The American Historical Association. Brown wanted to learn more about D’Innocenzo’s work in fostering “intergenerational relationships built around the deliberative framework of National Issues Forums.”*

**Brown:** In a piece you wrote for *Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education*, you cited the assessment of Urie Bronfenbrenner, a psychologist, who argued that a “key gauge of any society is the extent to which one generation genuinely cares about the well-being of other generations.” You grew up in a much different time. Is there anything that you learned then that has especially informed your intergenerational work?

**D’Innocenzo:** I see one major similarity from my generational experience and one major difference. The similarity is that adults, especially parents, want their children to do better than they did. That was easier when I was growing up in an Italian ghetto where there was little formal education. All four of my grandparents were illiterate; my father had three years of school in Casalbordino on the Adriatic coast; my mother five years. I see parents and adults still having the same aspirations for advancement and success for their children, but it is harder for youth of today to outdistance parents who are college grads, who have advanced degrees and who have achieved high levels of affluence. Young people encounter many more stimuli, which can lead them astray, than they did in the more innocent times when I was growing up. Young people today, with the various knowledge explosions, have much more independence than my generation did.

This then leads to the principal difference that I see. When I was growing up we had a keen sense of the interconnectedness of the entire family. We all had a stake in each other and, indeed, that

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extended to the community. It was important not to cause disrespect for the family or the community, and there was a keen sense of reciprocal obligations, of looking out for each other and expecting to help take care of each other. Perhaps now, because of increasing geographical mobility, there are fewer family and community ties than there used to be.

**Brown:** That seems to connect with your observation that Hofstra students do their share of service-learning but they seldom make any connection between their service episodes and larger societal issues. As you put it “they act mostly ‘in the moment.’” Why is that?

**D’Innocenzo:** Mostly because they have not had role models to make the connections for them, including their parents and grandparents. Too few parents and relatives model for children what effective civic engagement entails—being attentive, informed, seeking to shape public policy. Lots of young people strive to be good and to “do good,” without thinking about structural aspects of society that would obviate the need for their volunteer services and help to empower the people they seek to assist in kind of a band-aid fashion. Folk singer Harry Chapin, founder of international hunger projects and Long Island Cares (who was a close friend of mine until his untimely death in a Long Island Expressway auto accident in 1982) always emphasized that feeding the hungry and housing the poor should be a temporary boost on the way to livable wages for all who worked; that society had an obligation to see that all who wanted to work could have a job with a livable wage and opportunities for decent housing and education. Fortunately, young people learn about structural aspects of power through some college courses and modeling by professors, but this would be more effective if parents and relatives did more reinforcement of sustained civic engagement for public policy.

**Brown:** Clearly, you remain concerned about the “increasing age separations in our society.” Specifically, what more can be done to overcome such separations?

**D’Innocenzo:** I was struck by a poll several months ago that indicated adults perceived a bigger generation gap than was recorded in the 1960s. Such a perception certainly seems surprising now, but in my own work and to paraphrase what Martin Luther King,

Jr. observed, people tend to misperceive/fear/distrust those who they don't know, and the main reason they don't know them is because they don't see them, spend time and speak with them when they are physically separated.

The key—as in any bonding, mutually respectful association—is to foster shared time that is meaningful to those who share it. In our work at Hofstra, the sponsoring of NIF deliberative forums has been a key vehicle for bringing people of all ages together on matters of common concern of citizenship. Young people are often less experienced and less sophisticated, which is not surprising, but when the importance of their citizenship is affirmed, both by the inclusive, structured format of the forums and by the positive interaction by adults, they rise to the occasion.

**Brown:** Could you give an example?

**D’Innocenzo:** There were the NIF healthcare forums we did during the past year. In these forums, where many thought the young were “the Invincibles” who wouldn’t pay for health insurance and did not care about the issue, the older folks appreciated the depth of youth experiences, especially regarding health issues and expenses for adult family members, but also in terms of their own vulnerabilities.

Among our best intergenerational associations were those at our campus in Hofstra with students and community folks, in public libraries, and when we took a bus load of adults and students for the

two hour ride from our campus. Not only was there appreciative interaction in a forum at the FDR Library in Hyde Park, but the deliberations and connections continued during the two hour bus ride on the way home.

Similar kinds of exchanges occur in my monthly Current Events in Perspective library programs, but they are not as effective.





The reasons include: the adults outnumber the young, the discussions are not structured as effectively as the forums, and the older folks are “regulars” who have been participating for a long time. I should note that when we have NIF forums and students have learned the process of deliberation, they have commented in reviews about adults “who don’t know how to deliberate,” who talk too much, who aren’t attentive to hearing others’ concerns and who don’t take care to weigh pros and cons. This has happened when adults come into forums, usually as first timers, and when the students have participated extensively in some of the courses we have designed for them.

**Brown:** Until 2004 you used adult moderators for the deliberative forums. Since then you have used students as moderators for forums as well as for intergenerational groups. What distinguishes the two from each other as to how forums are conducted?

**D’Innocenzo:** The key in all instances is preparing the moderators, whatever their age, to be scrupulously nonpartisan and to have them focus on the process for the group. In all instances, having comoderators is a real plus. It is difficult even for the most skillful moderator to be attentive to all that is happening, but when there is a second person, there can be more ongoing process assessment and taking care to see that pros, cons, and reflection are attended to.

Our greatest successes have come when we have done forums that are comoderated intergenerationally, with one student and one adult. In order to expand that kind of experience, we have often arranged the forum so that there would be two comoderators for each of the approaches. So if the issue had three approaches, we’d have six comoderators and then two comoderators to do the concluding assessments of the forum. Because leadership was shared across the generations, all felt a sense of ownership of the projects, and the elders, in particular, expressed delight about young people being involved in concerns about public issues and their sense of responsibility as facilitators and participants.

**Brown:** I know you have been concerned with what Hofstra’s Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) can do to include more people in age categories from their mid-20s to their 60s.

**D’Innocenzo:** This is the big challenge everywhere. My many friends who run library programs point out that this demographic is seldom involved, for the obvious reason of jobs, long distance commuting, child care, and, indeed, because of the range of other options for doing things in our metropolitan area. Sociologists have also been speaking increasingly of “time poverty,” both real and perceived, but with the same effects on people.

Our CCE and the University have been sponsoring a series of “breakfast forums” beginning at 8:00 am. This helps to involve working folks without a big disruption in their schedules, and we also take care to invite students. The format on these occasions, however, is mostly a principal speaker and Q and A. But people of more varied age groups do get to associate with each other during the 8:00 to 9:30 am session. In the case of evening programs—on campus and in the community—we do not have much success (nor do the libraries) in bringing out folks in those age categories. This challenge is worth more exploration.

**Brown:** Putting your intergenerational work in a larger perspective, I know you have cited Thomas Jefferson’s quote: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be.” Could you say more about how that relates to your work at Hofstra and on Long Island?

**D’Innocenzo:** It reminds me of when I met Rick Shenkman at Hofstra before the 2008 election when he had published his book, *Just How Stupid Are We? Facing the Truth About the American Voter*. My response was that all of us, no matter how educated—including professors—are ignorant about lots of things. I suggested that “ignorant,” rather than “stupid,” would be a less harshly judgmental term for the difficult process of being an attentive citizen these days, one who can reach informed judgments based on reliable knowledge. Shenkman’s response was that “people really are stupid because they don’t care about what they don’t know and they do not examine data carefully or critically.”

That discussion reinforced views that had been evolving for me for some time, especially recognizing how time consuming and difficult it is today for most people to exhibit or sustain civic engagement. Part of the issue is the sheer amount of time it takes to become informed about complex issues and to sort

through the various spins, and to find reliable sources for information. Consequently, with both students and adults, I increasingly emphasize how challenging the process of citizenship has become, *how especially we need to talk with others, ask questions, seek evidence, and be open to a variety of approaches to deal with public issues.*

**Brown:** And what happens?

**D’Innocenzo:** The rather obvious result of this approach is that people understandably appreciate not being called “idiotes” (as the Greeks characterized those who did not vote, hold office, or who were uninformed about public matters). Acknowledging that we all face challenges of citizenship fosters a shared sense of community striving, for adults as well as for students, because all of us are more characterized by our deficiencies of knowledge than our mastery of political data. By eschewing the tendency to mock the public or label it inferior, people are encouraged to be part of the striving process to make democracy work better. In the best of circumstances—in forums (which establish clear ground rules about deliberation and civility) and town meetings (which seek similar process, but which are not as formally structured)—youth and adults engage in a shared quest for the kind of knowledge and judgment that can make all of us better informed citizens who can act more effectively to serve the public good.

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Just about everyone recognizes, as Jefferson emphasized, that knowledge is power, and folks of all ages appreciate refresher guides as well as new initiatives about how to fulfill the citizenship roles that speak to their better selves.

**Brown:** “Knowledge is power.” You have said that to examine power is a continuing theme in all your courses—how it is acquired, who gets it, how it is used and who benefits. Just how do you explore this theme with your students? Does it also arise in the intergenerational work you pursue outside the classroom?

**D’Innocenzo:** The practical matter of “power” is central to history class discussions and to the intergenerational community work. My seven monthly “town meetings” on “Current Events in Perspective” take place at libraries in East Meadow, Freeport, Hicksville, Jericho, Manhasset, Northport and Syosset on Long Island. Those attending vary from 100 to 200 per session.

In the adult and intergenerational sessions we sometimes have folks who are thoroughly negative about all who hold or seek power, believing that politicians are not to be trusted and neither is government. However, this is definitely a minority view among the more than one thousand community participants and among the students in college classes as well. Sustained involvement in discussions leads to a more mature appreciation of the complexity of politics and a reluctance to stereotype officeholders. Many participate, not only from month to month; some folks have been coming to these community town meetings for a few decades. And happily, for me, so have former students when they become alumni.

**Brown:** When examining “power,” what is your focus?

**D’Innocenzo:** My focus on power in the classroom and the community examines the roles both of the elected officials and of the citizens who place them in office. While citizens sometimes understandably complain of the pernicious role of money in politics and of the powers of incumbency, I believe they have a much deeper appreciation of the public service of most politicians and of the difficulties of making democracy work in our complex society.

In the classroom and in the community, I highlight what I learned from my teacher Henry Steele Commager, who emphasized how difficult it is to make government work in a nation that is physically larger than China, where England would fit inside of Pennsylvania, France inside of Oregon and Italy inside of California. To boot, with more than 300 million people now, we are not only one of the largest nations in the world, but also one of the most diverse. I go beyond Commager and point out that there are probably more than 140 different ethnic/nationality groups—and that’s in Queens County alone! That comment is always an attention generator in our region where people know that Queens County, though only one of the five boroughs of the Greater City of New York, is probably the most diverse place in the world.

In these contexts, more realistic views develop about the necessity of compromise, of “the art of the possible” when persuasion and trade-offs are necessary. Students and adults still strive for change, reform, and greater responsiveness, but they are less impatient and have a keener sense of how difficult it is to get anything done.

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**Brown:** What citizens *themselves* can and should do. Please go on.

**D’Innocenzo:** The first responsibility of citizens is to engage their minds before they open their mouths. This means being attentive to what is happening in our nation and the world. As I have already indicated, it is not an easy task for anyone to find reliable knowledge on the basis of which to make informed judgments. Most people I speak with—of all ages—are rather at a loss about identifying reliable sources. They are also confounded by the complexity of the issues. Many point out that both the House and Senate developed healthcare bills that were more than 1,000 pages long. Some astute observers pointed out that many provisions in the laws that were passed have extensive links to other laws that were passed in previous years. How do normal—even very smart—citizens enter these conversations about public policy?

It reminds me of a recent “Colbert Report” show when Steven Colbert flashed the photo of NYU professor Jay Rosen on the screen and with his mischievous humor said, “this professor is urging networks to fact-check their guests.” Colbert then brought on the interim host of ABC “This Week,” Jake Tapper, who agreed to implement Rosen’s proposal. Colbert also brought into that discussion the person who was going to do the fact-checking with his on-line organizations. Young people and elders alike who saw the program, or heard about it, applauded this effort to sort out the “spin” and self-serving rhetoric so that they can be more confident about data.

**Brown:** So what do you see happening?

**D’Innocenzo:** Knowledge is power and as people acquire more, they think more creatively about how to shape or reshape society. Obviously, they can join political organizations, although major parties have been suffering from citizen disillusionment and declining involvement. There are approximately 51 million Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 who have historically had the lowest voter registration and the lowest percentage voter turnout. Youth are waiting to be told they matter; they have time and energy. We are ready for a reinvigoration of smart party participation. Some

of my best students have told me that one of the major political parties in our region has been forming special youth divisions, and actively involving young people in substantive issues and political planning. The youth feel that their ideas and participation are taken seriously and that their involvement goes beyond just doing scut work.

**Brown:** There is a great deal of debate these days about the Internet's capacity for promoting and sustaining bottom-up political change.

**D'Innocenzo:** People are eager to make a difference. The new technology is making it easier to share information and to plan political involvement. In New Jersey, during the latter part of April this year, the governor urged voters to reject school budgets unless districts agreed to teacher salary freezes. A majority of districts, for the first time *ever*, did reject budgets. Less than two weeks later, high school students using connecting Facebook accounts organized thousands of students who walked out of their school classes on the same day in a coordinated protest against the

governor's effort to constrict  
their school  
programs.

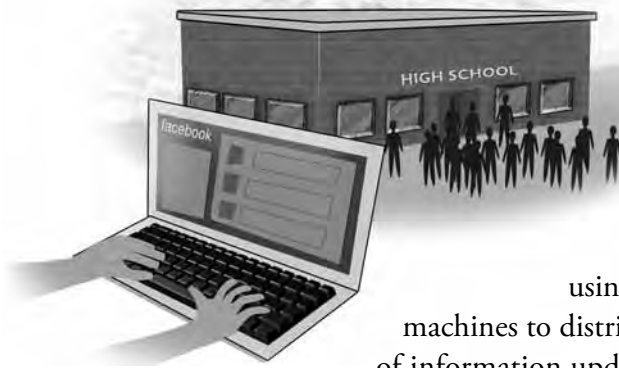
This is a  
far cry  
from  
Martin  
Luther  
King, Jr.

using mimeograph  
machines to distribute hundreds  
of information updates each day

during the Montgomery Bus Boycott  
and organizing squads of volunteers to take the responsibility of  
distributing them by hand so that a sustained involvement could  
be fostered.

There are certainly many ways that "www" can work and *has* worked. Just look at how much money Obama was able to raise over the Internet and at his organization's ability to create "flash mobs" almost immediately. I have personally been involved in

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fostering meetings and protests on very short notice using “LIST-SERVS” or postings on blogs that attracted new people. The potential and the reality of generating—and sustaining—numbers of people who share and exchange views is enormous.

**Brown:** Is there any downside?

**D’Innocenzo:** The risk is that the web is susceptible to “narrowcasting,” where people, especially the young, turn away from “broadcasting” (newspapers, major broadcast media) and just tune in to what they are already interested in. This can develop and reinforce bonds that quickly separate folks. The narrowcasting, whether on the Internet or cable TV, concerns me because it can lead to escalation of emotion over reason and, as David Frum has recently argued, to “entertainers without responsibility,” whose stake is to inflame emotion and hatred rather than reason. The Internet, cable, and public access offer enormous potential for democratizing our society, but they also offer appeals to narrow groups that may not serve the larger interests of *res publica*—the “public good.”

**Brown:** Where do you come out?

**D’Innocenzo:** I believe we are ready for a new cycle of citizen activism, one in which more people will avail themselves of high tech communications and organizing to reclaim ways to seek the public good, with more attention to data and with more appreciation of the complexity of trade-offs even as they seek to fulfill Theodore Roosevelt’s admonitions: “words without action are intellectual debauchery; one must enter the arena and strive to do the deeds. This will not be a good country for any of us unless we make it a better nation for all of us.”

**Brown:** Thank you, Mike.

# THE COMMUNITY THAT CANNOT SPEAK

By William J. Ball

After many years of organizing deliberative forums as a faculty member at a public college in New Jersey, I recently relocated to Stetson University, a private institution in DeLand, Florida. A very substantial change in the nature of the surrounding community has afforded me a rare opportunity to engage, from the perspective of an experienced newcomer, in systematic observation of the local need for deliberative community politics and the potential role of institutions of higher education in filling those needs. Rather than focus on details of the work of a university center, in this essay, I will look at the broad structural aspects of civic life as I have encountered it here in order to make the case for a particular charge for higher education to improve it. Although I focus on Florida and my region within it, many of the same characteristics I present can be found in communities across the country.

At a recent Kettering Foundation workshop, John Dedrick defined the elements of community as “people, a place, and institutions.” This provides an excellent framework for organizing my observations about the need for community politics.

## People

While reflecting national averages in terms of income, ethnicity, and education, Florida is essentially a state of newcomers like me. Only a third of its residents were born in the state—second in this respect only to Nevada—which is about half the national average. Florida’s population has almost doubled since 1980. This meteoric rise in the population tends to overshadow an equally strong mobility that includes those leaving the state and those who tend to move back and forth as opportunities in other regions ebb and flow. The recent crash in Florida’s growth-based economy has emptied outlying suburbs and hollowed out more established communities. Although it is possible to find scattered examples of “Old Florida” (including here in DeLand, founded in 1876), this is largely a restless, uprooted population, few of whom have a deep connection to their current community as “home.”



Politically, the people of Florida are situated in highly partisan enclaves, yet are quite passive in electoral politics, which leads to relatively low voter turnout. At the national level, this leads to the state's "battleground" status, and, more recently, to Florida's leading role in the tea party movement that challenges the nature of the relationship between citizens and government. At the local level, it has led to a severe case of racial gerrymandering in DeLand, where the historically African American section of town has been attached to Democratic state and congressional districts that have no geographic connection to the Republican state and congressional districts representing the rest of the city. This gives the people of the DeLand area little motivation to come together as a whole political community.

The constant inflow and turnover of population and the contested legitimacy of all forms of government make any notion of political community among the people here a thin one indeed. As the *National Journal's* profile of the state noted:

What may be fragile in Florida is civil society; Florida can be disorderly and chaotic. Most people here do not have deep roots in the state, most communities sprang into existence within living memory and, if Florida gives people more freedom and options than they may ever have imagined, it has also given them more disruption and crime than they surely anticipated.

This characterization of overall civic weakness was confirmed in detail by the 2009 edition of the *Florida Civic Health Index*, which concluded that the civic culture of the state is "one of the worst in the nation," based on its ranking of 34th in voter turnout, 37th in the percentage of citizens who worked to address community issues, 48th in the percentage who attended public meetings, and 49th in the percentage who volunteered.

## **Place**

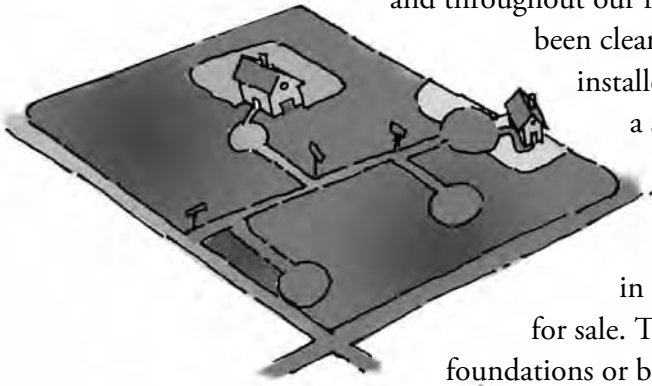
Florida can best be understood less as a southern state and more as a contemporary frontier state. The only east coast state that is not part of the original colonies, Florida became a state in 1845 but had only 1.9 million residents a full century later. Compare this to its estimated 18 million residents today. Virtually all of the "places" in the state are recent creations of the automobile, the baby boom, and air conditioning.

DeLand, located between Orlando and Daytona in Volusia County, is uncharacteristic for its region. DeLand and Stetson University were created together in the late 19th century by the utopian ambitions of a baking soda magnate and a hat manufacturer, and continue to enjoy a strong sense of partnership in sustaining a local community with deep (for Florida) historical roots. Much more typical of our region is the neighboring city of Deltona. Created by a developer in 1962 from unincorporated land, with a name merging “DeLand” and “Daytona” and a main street named after the builders, Deltona didn’t incorporate as a city until 1995 (after the voters had twice before rejected incorporation). Meanwhile, its population exploded from 15,000 in 1980 to 85,000 today, making Deltona the largest city in the county and dwarfing neighboring DeLand. The end of the explosive growth of Deltona is not in sight; while there are 33,000 developed residential lots in Deltona, there are 36,000 more lots zoned and surveyed, just waiting to be built on once demand returns.

Yet, for all its size, Deltona was laid out as simple tract housing and grew through the unplanned agglomeration of more developments—a sunnier version of Levittown that just kept eating up the surrounding countryside. This substantial city has no downtown, no shopping malls, no theater or playhouse, few services (including very undersized water and sewer systems), no hospital, poor road access, no newspaper, and a political culture that is dominated by lawsuits and recriminations. It is even experiencing its own municipal secessionist movement. The residents of Deltona must get in their cars and leave their city to find almost any aspect of community life beyond school and possibly church. Although these neighboring cities admittedly occupy opposite ends of the scale, the story of the places of central Florida is much closer to the story of Deltona than that of DeLand.

Many places in central Florida can take on ghostly characteristics that make them even harder to honestly label “communities.” My students describe the isolation of growing up in cities that have whole neighborhoods abandoned for more than half of each year when the “snowbirds” return north. Year-round retirement and second home communities entice new residents into separated and gated communities to partake in what one analysis terms “consumers on an extended vacation or a self-centered and

civically blind retirement, passing away the time in life-style enclaves cut off from fellow citizens unlike themselves” (Arrington and Marlowe, 2009). Following the tremendous crash in the residential real estate market, a new form of community apparition has appeared around town



and throughout our region: large developments that have been clear cut and had streets built, utilities installed, lots laid out, and yet contain just a scattered handful of completed and occupied homes. Some of these neighborhoods-that-never-happened now feature signs out in front offering the entire development for sale. They also feature partially completed foundations or bare framing, beginning to weather like an old west boom town just after abandonment.

## Institutions

While religious groups, other nonprofits, and schools are also important institutions in our communities, I will focus here first on government and then on higher education. The other institutions are not positioned to take the lead in civic life. The weakness of Florida’s nonprofits (including its religious institutions) in producing its civic culture are documented in the *Florida Civic Health Index*. Likewise, Florida’s public school districts are not in a strong position to improve the civic health of its local communities, as they are among the least well-funded and yet largest in the nation.

## Government

State politics in Florida is characterized by a deep distrust between the people and their elected representatives. This is illustrated by a rising tide of populist direct democracy followed by a governmental backlash. After more than 75 percent of the population approved strict term limits for the state legislature in 1992, the use of ballot propositions to set policy directly accelerated, culminating (in notoriety) with a successful constitutional amendment in 2002 to prohibit the confinement of

pregnant pigs. The “pregnant pig” amendment has, in turn, led to a series of counter moves by the legislature to limit the ability of the people to govern directly and ultimately to a constitutional amendment (ironically approved by 58 percent of the voters) to require a 60 percent supermajority for the approval of state ballot propositions. Arrington and Marlowe document that while electoral battles raged, state government—as an institution—did much to degrade its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens by “starving the beast” and inciting “tax rage,” especially during the Jeb Bush governorship. The ongoing confrontation between the people and their governments permeates Florida’s political culture.

The troubled relationship between Florida’s governments and its people can clearly be seen in the proposed Amendment 4, appearing on the fall 2010 statewide ballot after seven years of campaigns and litigation. Amendment 4 would require that any changes to the adopted growth plan made by local or county governments be submitted to the voters for approval. Proponents of the amendment (many environmental groups and current homeowners) see it as the only way to rein in governments they don’t trust to make decisions in the people’s interest. Opponents to the amendment (most public officials and business interests) see it as a destruction of the role of representative government. Deliberative forums held at Stetson regarding the public’s role in planning for growth and development revealed both the deep divide over Amendment 4 and the wedge it has driven even deeper between citizens and government in Florida’s political culture. When surveyed, participants in the forums were split exactly evenly between supporting and opposing the amendment. Deliberations and written comments at the forums illustrated a familiar pattern on the issue: participants working in government, or closely allied to it in the development industry, strongly view the amendment as a usurpation of government power by an uninformed and ill-prepared citizenry. Everyone else sees it as a necessary, even if blunt, step toward reinserting citizens into a policy process that ignores their interests. These forums were a bittersweet experience to observe. Virtually everyone loved the opportunity to engage in deliberation, but no one could see a

*Everyone loved the opportunity to engage in deliberation, but no one could see a way forward in resolving the divide.*

way forward in resolving the divide aside from battling it out at the statewide ballot box.

Our experience with the first round of deliberative forums and subsequent community-based research also revealed a deep difference of perspectives within the institution of government along the old politics-administration divide. While the state level political culture controlling the gateway to elected offices emphasizes cutting taxes and disempowering government, the shrinking cadre of administrators and civil servants has tried to carry on by becoming a sort of “ungovernment.” The public parking spaces in front of DeLand City Hall marked “customer parking” illustrate how local government is trying hard to disguise itself as a bank or insurance company that simply provides a service in exchange for taxes, not as an institution that expects its citizens to participate



in the work that it does. If there is a silver lining in the dire financial straits local governments currently find themselves in, it could exist as a side effect from “coproduction,” the emerging desperation tactic of asking citizens to volunteer work hours to keep public places such as

parks and ball fields operating. Citizens and government employees laboring side-by-side in Boytean public work projects could begin to change the relationship between citizens and the institution of government in a fundamental manner, but only if citizen-government collaboration reaches the level of policymaking, and there is no evidence that it is likely to cross that divide.

To date, government has instead produced a backlash from voters that has primarily, if inadvertently, served to reduce the potential for deliberative public participation in governance, with Amendment 4 being only the most recent example. The well-intended desire to make government more accountable to voters through formal means has produced term limits and a state legislature that meets for no more than 60 days a year; open public meetings and records rules that effectively prevent elected officials from attending meetings they don’t schedule; and public participation rules that limit citizens to the most brief and formalized appearances (with no opportunity to speak *to each other*). All of this has cul-

minated in a thorough squelching of any chance for meaningful citizen-government collaboration to emerge.

The sum of my observations of the civic environment produced through the people, places and institutions of my new home is that this is a community that currently exists in the thinnest and most fragile of senses. It is a community of uprooted newcomers that do not connect with their neighbors or public leaders, are not expected to, and, most likely do not know how to. It is a community of recent and fragmented places that are designed for high mobility and rapid expansion (or contraction), not for engendering a sense of belonging. This is a community that has been encouraged to hate and mistrust its government; a place where government has been seen as an unpleasant and depersonalized service for so long it has come to see itself that way, either barricading itself from the public behind inward-looking professionalism or by engaging in a race to put itself out of business. It is a community whose only option to engage in citizen politics is to mount massive partisan struggles to take formal power, with no plans for how to use it because, really, there is no community that can be identified. It is a community that is bereft of ideas about, or mechanisms for, bringing citizens and government together to collaborate on public problems. It is a community that cannot speak.

*This is a community that has been encouraged to hate and mistrust its government.*

## Higher Education

Based on the above characterization of the community, it is appropriate to ask what roles universities could play in promoting better civic life through deliberative citizen politics. Certainly the need is dire, and it is hard to imagine what institutions other than education could take the lead in beginning to address this need. There are two fundamental problems identified in the preceding analysis: communities that barely exist, primarily due to rapidly changing demographics, and an exceedingly poor relationship between citizens and government created, in part, by government policy itself.

Universities are not in a position to alter the underlying demographics that are preventing the emergence of a healthier civic life; only large scale changes in public policy could incentivize different patterns of growth that would ultimately strengthen the

foundations of community. Institutions of higher education can do two things here. They can, through their teaching and research missions, study how demographics impact civic life. They can also, through public scholarship and community-engaged learning, actively promote the building of community and sense of place across a wide array of academic disciplines. Indeed, it is the inherent (although not always realized) capability of universities to look at the long term, and to understand the nature of community from a variety of perspectives, that distinguishes them from other important institutions.

The citizen-government relationship problem points directly to Kettering Foundation's research question about the ability of institutions to regain their legitimacy for citizens. However, I believe the appropriate response here would be crafted differently than what has been offered before: that one



institution (higher education) should work to restore the legitimacy of another (government) in the eyes of citizens (and indeed of itself) by bringing both of these parties to the table in an effort to create an environment of shared governance. The need in this time and place is not just that citizens come together to practice deliberative citizen politics, but that citizens *and* government are brought together as

peers to reempower governance. I do not see that happening unless institutions of higher education take on the task of making it so.

There is some foundational work that can be accomplished by working with the two parties (citizens and government) separately. The recent initiative of the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (a project of the University of Central Florida and the University of Florida) to institutionalize civics education into the school system is to be commended as an example of laying part of the foundation for an engaged citizenry. Similarly, colleges and universities can

educate current and future members of governments to value community building and citizen engagement and train them in the appropriate methods to accomplish it. But these are just foundations of the real work, which is to empower governance by fixing the broken relationship between citizens and governments that pervades the political culture here. Doing this work may also be the best way to create a real sense of broader community in the short run.

Empowering governance will be daring work for higher education, needing much bravery and some outright audacity. It requires, using the old Quaker phrase, “speaking truth to power” about how government has to substantially change its perspective and policies to encourage citizen participation in governance and to recast government itself as a desirable and positive force in community life. This will be especially difficult for public institutions of higher education, which must live in constant fear of another round of state cuts to their budgets and mandates to their missions by elected officials. Just as importantly, citizens need to see the truth of the necessity of their participation in governance beyond the voting booth. They need to come to realize that by working to eliminate government from their lives they have worked to eliminate the capacity for governance, as well as the ability of their community to solve its problems. But rather than announce these truths from the ivory tower in lectures and publications, universities instead need to sponsor and cultivate public deliberations that are unabashedly premised on such truths. Universities need to be the source of a process that models the citizen politics we desire, a process of deliberative community governance that brings together citizens and government.

Yet how can institutions, and the individuals that work for them, internally justify the investment of time and effort to make this happen? The often discussed “roles and rewards” issue has probably been made overly complicated. Colleges and universities exist to educate their students and conduct scholarship (in different balances of those two). Many, if not most, have also already internalized the goal of community leadership in their missions. The problems discussed here then need to be attacked *through* educating students and conducting research, not in addition to them, for individuals conducting this work to receive the recogni-

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tion of their peers required for advancement and resourcing. The best means of supporting the emerging entrepreneurs of community politics within the ranks of higher education is effective mentoring of them to develop networks of peers who can validate the way in which their work advances good teaching and good scholarship.

### **From Analysis to Action**

What does all of this analysis mean for establishing a program of deliberative citizen politics at a smaller private university in central Florida? As a result of our forums on Amendment 4, my students and I have been approached by the City of DeLand to establish a partnership to conduct a series of neighborhood-level forums over the next year in an effort to build citizen-government collaborations on long-term planning. The results of these forums are intended to inform joint city/county planning for the DeLand region. Although taking place in a local community that has an uncharacteristically strong sense of place for the region and deep ties to its private university, the project will have to explicitly confront all of the issues discussed in this essay.

Our initial strategy meetings have recognized the challenges to success that lie ahead. We will have to confront the difficulty of motivating residents who have few ties to the community and do not expect to be living here in future decades to be thoughtful about what their neighborhoods should be like in forty years. We will need to recognize that many will be suspicious of being assertively recruited by local government to collaborate. Indeed, many citizens will start from a perspective that rejects the very idea of public planning outright. Many others will have difficulty conceiving of collaborating with government rather than trying to take control of it in a partisan manner. Although the core city of DeLand has a strong sense of place, many of the geographic areas within the boundaries of the project lie in unincorporated county land ranging from rural to developed and gated to the semi-ghost neighborhoods I have described. The effort to engage people in planning will be as much an effort to encourage them to develop a sense of place and a concept of how their neighborhood is part of a larger community. Negotiating the politics-administration divide will be especially difficult. Even at this early date in the project, thinly veiled challenges

have been presented to the idea that planners and elected officials can work together and that local and county levels of government can collaborate sufficiently to be successful. Even if we can successfully overcome these challenges, actually *implementing* a plan that emerges from a citizen-government collaboration will be made very difficult by the continuing assault on governmental legitimacy and resources in the state.

Yet, we are entering this project with important assets, including the people of DeLand's relatively strong sense of place, Stetson's deep commitment to its community, and the city's recognition of the value of collaborating with its citizens in determining its future. Our initial round of forums has shown us much about the challenges that lie ahead, but we also discovered that even in a community with a weak civic life, and little previous experience with talking with each other, public deliberation produces immediate and positive affective results. Capitalizing on the good feelings and sense of new possibilities created in that round of deliberation to discover common ground and ultimately move to action will be essential in establishing the sense of collaborative efficacy between citizens and government that creates the community resilience most needed during trying times.

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# HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Strengthening Democracy through a University Institute

By Katrina Rogers and Charles McClintock

Higher education has an important role to play in fostering civic life. Scholars have pointed out that universities should be models for building engaged communities, but have become dominated by the forces of materialism, individualism, and competitiveness (Astin, 1993). Countervailing this tendency, many institutions of higher education have invested in service-learning as a way to connect the theory and research of the academy with the practice of community work (Speck & Hoppe, 2004). Service-learning combines community service with classroom instruction, focusing on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs often involve students in activities that address local needs while also developing their academic skills (Ikeda, 2001). Community colleges, in particular, have embraced service-learning as a way to foster civic commitment as a lifelong, engaged learning process.

Discussions of the relationship between higher education and the community generally focus on the role of undergraduate institutions. Few graduate educators have embraced the notion that ideas of service-learning—bridging theory and practice, developing civic engagement, and teaching critical thinking and reflective skills—are integral to a graduate learning environment. Notable exceptions include the master's program at the University of Arkansas' Clinton School of Public Service and the University of Washington's doctoral program in communication and citizen engagement. Northwestern University and the University of Texas at Austin also offer opportunities for graduate students to participate in discussions about civic engagement and the role of the intellectual in promoting the public good. In these university settings, centers

for civic engagement embody the values that foster democracy and become the places on campus that serve as connectors between universities and communities.

To review the efficacy of organizing a civic engagement center within a university, this essay looks at one such center, and examines its structural arrangements, educational programs and research, and methods of community engagement, as well as the challenges it faces.

## **Structure**

The Institute for Social Innovation (ISI) is housed within the School of Human & Organizational Development at Fielding Graduate University. Fielding is a stand-alone graduate institution, founded in 1974 by a group of scholars committed to changing the face of higher learning at the doctoral level. These scholars were adherents of Malcolm Knowles' adult learning theory, which emphasized older adults as independent learners in need of graduate-level, high-quality curricula. They created a distributed community of scholars who met six times a year to attend seminars and workshops leading to doctoral degrees in psychology. Fielding was accredited by WASC in the 1980s and by APA in the 1990s. Since that time, the schools of Human & Organizational Development, and Educational Leadership for Change have been added. Fielding currently enrolls 1,400 graduate students and has masters and certificate programs in various subjects, including an award-winning dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement certificate.

ISI is a key component of Fielding Graduate University's missions to: serve a community of scholar-practitioners dedicated to lifelong learning; promote social justice and change; and foster innovation and advancement for individuals, organizations, communities, and society. ISI was created to support individuals and organizations that address social problems by building leadership and organizational capacity. ISI conducts work with numerous partners in three program areas: leadership for change, which focuses on action that sustains social change; organizational development that emphasizes collaboration to produce more effective organizations; and research that blends multidisciplinary theory and practice. Within Fielding, ISI is the center in which students,

faculty, and alumni conduct research, provide leadership for change educational programs, and create partnerships with community organizations to advance social change. In addition to the School of Human & Organizational Development, ISI also serves the other two schools within the university. Under this arrangement, the school supports ISI with resources, including overhead, and staff allocation.

ISI has a part-time director, who oversees a constellation of projects led by faculty, alumni, and student teams. Most projects are funded by external sources, such as grants through foundations and individual donors. The director raises funds for projects and provides support for others to write grants to finance their work. The institute also has a full-time project manager who focuses on communications, grant writing, and administration for the leadership for change educational programs. Important institutional and fundraising tasks are accomplished by the dean of the School of Human & Organizational Development with informal support from the deans of the other two schools as well as the provost and president.

In terms of governance, an advisory group composed of community leaders meets periodically to discuss research agendas, leadership for change programs, and community projects. They advise on program structure, community outreach, fundraising, and communications. The advisory group's contacts, as well as its insight into community needs and interests, help ISI bridge the distance between the university and community. Having the advisory group's support and assistance in meeting with community members has been an important component of ISI's success.

## **Leadership for Change: Educational Programs**

ISI's leadership for change work focuses on educational programs in dialogue and deliberation. This ranges from offering a certificate, hosting guest speakers with specific expertise, and designing workshops in different content areas. ISI leadership thought this approach would have a multiplier effect and help accomplish several goals: 1) develop an intellectual interest in dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement among students, faculty members, and alumni within Fielding; 2) identify individuals

who would be interested in working with ISI on dialogue and deliberation methods and approaches; 3) create community partnerships that would generate opportunities for working with the public using dialogic tools; and 4) experiment with different methods in workshops and dialogue settings to refine their repertoire and develop a research agenda.

## **Organizational Development: Community Projects**

ISI assembles teams of faculty, students, and alumni to build capacity in businesses, nonprofit programs, and government agencies. Most recently, ISI teams have worked with Wilderness Inquiry, a national organization dedicated to inclusive outdoor experiences for disabled and able-bodied individuals; the Institute for Conservation Leadership in Montana, which fosters leadership development in the conservation community nationwide; and Orion House, a facility for at-risk youth in New Hampshire. Other partners have included the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina, the City and County of Santa Barbara, California, Palmetto Health of South Carolina, and multi-national First Data Corporation.

When ISI was asked to work with Casa Esperanza, Santa Barbara County's largest homeless facility, they immediately suggested a series of public dialogues. An ISI team, several of whose members have received moderator training at National Issue Forum (NIF) workshops, worked with Casa Esperanza on a Summit series attended by community members to discuss issues of homelessness in their community. Since January 2009, the number of seniors and disabled people seeking shelter care has nearly doubled, and the overall number of people seeking help has risen by 30 percent. In addition to addressing this demand, Casa Esperanza also needed clarity about future directions and strategic outlook, and faced a possible merger with two other community organizations which provide assistance to homeless individuals. The dialogues' participants ranged



*The dialogues' participants ranged from business leaders and government officials to nonprofit support services and homeless individuals.*

from business leaders and government officials to nonprofit support services and homeless individuals. As the ISI team facilitated these discussions, they learned quickly that they needed to provide an open environment for airing the diversity of opinions about homelessness. As community members sought to frame the issue, they decided to employ The World Café method as a supplement to the National Issues Forum approach.

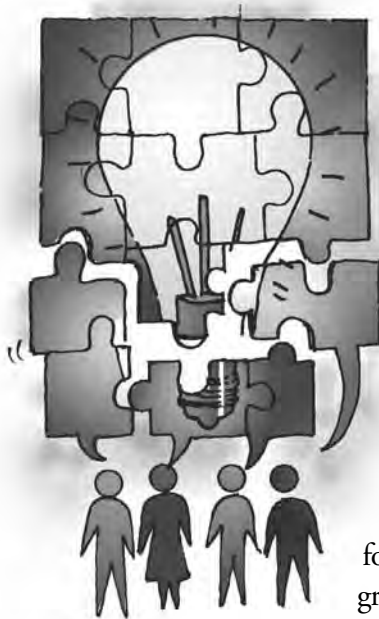
The World Café is a method for constructing group conversation. It is based on a set of integrated design principles that help participants discuss questions in reflective and engaging ways. These conversations build on previous discussions as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, and community. As a process, the World Café can reveal the collective intelligence of a group, which increases the capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims.

As a result of these dialogues, ISI was asked to help Casa Esperanza build organizational capacity to fulfill their mission to help homeless individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency. ISI continues to collect data on services rendered, placements arranged, members trained, health monitored, and housing referrals made.

Part of this task includes better communication with other community groups, such as business and service organizations. In this way, ISI is also the purveyor of Fielding's service-learning endeavors in communities.

## Research

As a center within an academic graduate institution, ISI offers a platform for investigating research questions that result from community engagement. Research can reveal new approaches and limitations to community work and strengthen theoretical understandings about what it takes to build and maintain a flourishing democracy. The following examples of doctoral work conducted by ISI graduate students illustrate the integration of theoretical and societal issues in support of the public good.



- *Health disparities among black and white women* concentrates on minority women's access to healthcare and wellness, and supported the creation of a community program that provides life and professional coaching services to economically disadvantaged and minority women.
- *Aging and cognitive therapy* focuses on music therapy programs that increase cognitive and social function for elderly adults recovering from strokes or suffering with Alzheimer's disease.
- *Ethical leadership in organizational settings* explores a model of ethical leadership in organizations experiencing economic, social, and political pressures for change. The findings supported the design of executive education programs for leaders in global business environments.
- *Intercultural competencies and leadership* research examines the ways leaders develop intercultural competencies. The findings formed the basis for skill-building programs for leaders in the sustainability movement.

## The Challenges Ahead

ISI leadership has learned a good deal about both the content of the work and the process by which it engages in dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement. The example of ISI reveals some interesting elements for further consideration.

Feedback about the structure of ISI is positive. Two additional suggestions from the advisory group are to involve more people in order to widen the circle in which the institute could operate, and to consider how to better publicize the success of the community projects. In this way, the institute could be more readily identified as an effective partner for naming and solving common problems.

Decisions to engage in community projects are led by the director with consultation from the dean. This is a simple process, which has the advantage of agility. It lacks, however, a process by which more individuals could be engaged in a deliberative way. As the reputation of ISI grows, decision making could evolve to include more voices to widen the range of choices available. These options include not only selecting the project, but also defining research questions, determining the process by which students engage in the work, and measuring impact and success.



*Citizen participants can be impatient, and often want to act quickly on matters that are of importance to them.*

Among the challenges facing ISI is the difficulty in making clear and evident distinctions between dialogue and deliberation for community participants. ISI staff members have learned that participants need time to explore deliberation as a particular method for problem solving. When time is an issue, they have learned not to run a short deliberative process, but rather to explain the process and then offer several opportunities for deliberation. It has been helpful to have dialogue and deliberation educators as project leaders who can provide examples of other community work that has incorporated dialogue and deliberation.

ISI leadership has observed that citizen participants can be impatient, and often want to act quickly on matters that are of importance to them. ISI has learned to couch their dialogue and deliberative practices within the context of social action. They adapted their work to get to the point more quickly in the introductory portion of the community dialogues, and to be ready to change the format depending on the individuals that participate. Since citizen audiences are often unfamiliar with reflective practice, ISI teams have found that they can incorporate rumination within the feedback and “next steps” components of a community dialogue.

Fielding’s university audience offers fertile ground to explore the theory of dialogue and deliberation. Faculty, students, and alumni are interested in conducting research and leading projects, although the constraints of time and financing create limited engagement for most. Working in teams also seems to be the best approach for sharing the workload.

In connecting with other organizations, ISI staff found that discussing their educational mission within the context of the

public good is well received. Although

they have not underestimated the time it takes to build community relationships, ISI competes with the other time demands of the ISI staff and project leaders. This was one of the difficulties with setting up moderator training; they didn’t have enough support



to do the necessary networking and long-term planning needed to obtain enough participants. ISI also learned to pay more attention up front to the organization's commitment and capacity to support civic engagement capacity.

Conversations with their partners suggest that people want community activities that emphasize tacit knowledge (connections, conversations, problem solving, skill-building). This would complement other dialogue- and deliberation-related initiatives, which focus more on explicit information stored for retrieval. In their community work, ISI staff observed that it is rare for citizens to strongly associate their own work and identity with some element of dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement. Participants may be land managers whose work sometimes involves public engagement, or consultants who sometimes use dialogue, for example, but community members tend to become dedicated to issues that reflect their passions or their sense of community identity. The energy in the group therefore tends to be issue-driven, whereas dialogue and deliberation are seen as process-driven—a tool, rather than an approach integral to the decisions made.

Another challenge is that dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement comprise a broad domain. For example, someone who works with *AmericaSpeaks* on social justice issues may not relate to public engagement work around taxes or biodiversity. This challenge directly affects community engagement. There is still a scarcity of full-time dialogue and deliberation professionals keen on supporting the community for the long term. This can be a time-consuming activity, sometimes with few visible benefits. It is often done in other communities as a volunteer activity, or an activity supported with modest remuneration. In this regard, one of the strengths of ISI is that they are committed to the community for the long term.

ISI leadership has decided to build a learning group, based on those who were leading the community projects, to capitalize on the potential synergy of the participants who are working on projects aimed at building civic engagement capacity. The learning group would serve two purposes: 1) to support each other in learning while working on specific projects and 2) to focus explicitly on collective learning from projects about building civic engagement capacity.

*People want community activities that emphasize tacit knowledge.*

ISI needs to continue to experiment with ways to deepen conversations, conduct moderator training, and provide dialogue and deliberation workshops in an online platform. This approach is now an expectation of many participants, as social network and web 2.0 platforms proliferate.



In thinking about the ISI's work as a purveyor of service-learning concepts, a university interested in strengthening its support for civic engagement can make use of centers and institutes as a means of bridging academic boundaries and connecting with public needs. An opportunity that derives from this work is that the institute can also be an actor, identifying a range of public issues that can be the focus of scholarly research.

## Conclusion

In these early days of ISI, leadership has learned a great deal about different approaches to and models for building civic engagement capacity and embedding it in communities and organizations. ISI intends to build on this knowledge to deepen the practice of dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement to strengthen groups, organizations, and communities. The goal is to continue creating programs that have multiplier effects in building a cadre of skilled practitioners and leaders that fulfill the scholarly and practical orientation of service-learning. To accomplish this goal, ISI will:

- Continue testing and learning dialogue and deliberation with community partners.
- Develop ways to attract and partially sponsor participants who have creative ideas and the commitment to communities or organizations to build civic engagement capacity.
- Use an action-research reflective model to document and share what is learned about building civic engagement.
- Continue to expand international participation in dialogue and deliberation work through educational programs and an online community of practice.

- Build relationships with local media in order to raise visibility for dialogue and deliberation work and offer media partners a chance to use these tools in action.

ISI's work has grown from the base of a strictly educational program to encompass a much broader and deeper understanding of the ways in which dialogue and deliberation can be integrated into other programs and community projects at Fielding Graduate University. Programs at Fielding emphasize both research (scholarship) and practice (the implementation of ideas in a community setting). As a direct result of this work, ISI looks to a future that incorporates dialogue and deliberation across content areas.

As knowledge of its work spreads, ISI is being inundated with requests to facilitate dialogues. In the future, ISI staff will be sorting through these requests and deciding how to handle them with limited resources. As programming is expanded, ISI will have to make choices, which means developing a conceptual framework for these decisions. ISI work has also come to the attention of local and congressional politicians from California. The ISI staff is particularly excited by the opportunity to educate political leaders about the roles that dialogue and deliberation can play in the political process as they relate to public engagement.

Graduate education often is overlooked as a source of service-learning in support of the public good. Despite the barriers to doing so, this example of Fielding Graduate University's doctoral programs shows that it is possible to combine sound scholarship with social change engagement. Imagine a cadre of doctoral-level scholar-practitioners, nurtured through a scholar-practitioner model of transformative learning and encouraged by centers and institutes to ask fundamental questions that lead to social change in their communities. It is our hope that more graduate programs will take up this challenge of integrating service-learning into their pedagogy, curricula, and research outcomes.

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# *WHEN THE PEOPLE SPEAK:* *Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*

By James S. Fishkin

Foday Sulimani, Reviewer

Fishkin takes on a subject that remains largely unexamined: how two fundamental values of democracy—political equality and deliberation—could be simultaneously realized. According to Fishkin, two unstated presumptions about democracy involve including “all” the people in the political process (political equality) and providing a basis for them to think about the issues they decide (deliberation). Scholars would agree that political equality and deliberation are essential conditions for democracy, but differ on how they could be simultaneously realized in the political process. This book proposes the use of deliberative democracy as a solution to the challenge of including the general citizenry in politics and policy formulation, under conditions that motivate them to really think about the issues.

The author defines deliberative democracy as the combination of political equality and deliberation. In deliberative democracy, everyone’s views are equally considered under conditions that allow participants to have face-to-face discussions that “conscientiously raise and respond to competing arguments so as to arrive at considered judgments about the solutions to public problems.” (p. 17) The process is deliberative because it provides informative and mutually respectful discussion in which people consider the issue on its merits. The process is democratic because it requires the equal counting of everyone’s views. However, realizing both political equality and deliberation in combination remains a major challenge for modern democracies. The United States has wrestled with this challenge from the enactment of the Constitution to contemporary times, when various democratic theorists continue to offer competing visions of what true democracy entails.

Fishkin, like many other scholars, acknowledges that it is difficult to achieve both political equality and deliberation, or what he calls inclusion and thoughtfulness. He traces this difficulty to the manipulation of the public by political elites and also identifies

other limitations of public opinion in modern, developed societies. In exploring how the views of the public could be heard in the political process, Fishkin argues that many of the methods and technologies that have been used to give voice to the public will be manipulative, and thus are not representative of the public. Some of these “democratic practices”—which some democratic theorists endorse as appropriate terms of political competition between parties and between organized interests—distort the way public views are expressed and shaped. Consequently, they only provide opportunities for those who are well-enough organized to “capture” the political process and “detour democracy from the dual aspiration to realize political equality and deliberation.” (p. 2)

Many methods and technologies that are used to give voice to the public will distort “refined public opinion” and only serve as a platform for special interests. The technology and culture of the modern “persuasion industry” has made it possible for elites to take liberties with facts and perspectives, shape opinion, and then invoke those opinions in the name of democracy. Fishkin is critical of the U.S. political process, which he asserts has been “colonized by the persuasion industry.” Deliberation, which was intended as a means through which representatives could “refine and enlarge” or “filter” the public voice, is overshadowed by various techniques of persuasion that shape opinion, sell candidates and policies to constituents, or mobilize voting in ways that are manipulative. The author agrees that democracy needs to preserve ample room for freedom of thought and expression and that persuasion is a natural activity within that protected space. But he also suggests that we need to be cognizant of the fact that manipulation takes place within that space as well. The danger to democracy occurs when freedom of thought and expression are used to manipulate public opinion.

Fishkin further argues that we have a political system in which it is difficult to effectively motivate citizens to become informed about the political process. We have a general citizenry that lacks knowledge, a highly partisan political environment, and a mass society that is vulnerable to manipulation. Fishkin states that a well-informed citizenry that produces “informed, considered opinions for politics and policy is a public good.” (p. 7) However, given the

aforementioned limitations, society contends with an underinformed and nondeliberative mass public, thus making it difficult to achieve both inclusion and thoughtfulness.

Fishkin identifies two types of institutions that try to give voice to public opinion. One type of institution (as seen in mass democracies) gives a snapshot of “raw public opinion”—one in which the public is usually not very informed, engaged, and attentive. Another sort of institution (as seen through representative institutions) gives expression to “refined public opinion”—opinion that has “been tested by the consideration of competing arguments and information conscientiously offered by others who hold contrasting views.” (p. 14) The political systems in America and in most developed democracies have veered toward greater raw public opinion as opposed to refined or more deliberative views. However, using raw public opinion as a gauge in determining policy options is a problem for democracy because the public’s consent is only valuable when obtained under conditions when the people are thoroughly informed about the decisions they are making. According to Fishkin, the way out of this dilemma is to create a more informed, engaged, and attentive public opinion that is also generally shared by the entire mass public.

Fishkin proposes his concept of “deliberative polls” as the best method to ensure political equality, inclusion, and deliberation. In other words, Fishkin is arguing that deliberative polling is the best method for deliberative democracy. In deliberative polls, a population is randomly selected and asked to respond to a telephone survey, after which they are convened together for many hours of deliberation in small groups and in plenary sessions. At the plenary sessions, competing candidates, experts, or policy makers respond to questions developed in the small groups. At the end of the process, participants fill out the same questionnaire as the one they had been given when they were first contacted. It is assumed that a randomly selected population not only captures the raw opinion of the general public, but also, through the deliberative process, reflects diverse views that help them refine their opinion. In areas where deliberative polling has been tested, answers to the post-deliberation questionnaire often show shifts in the opinions of participants. Fishkin argues that the random selection of participants



addresses the issue of political equality, while the deliberation phase adds thoughtfulness to the process. But does this process provide the prerequisites of deliberative democracy?

Four questions that are central to deliberative democracy include: How inclusive is it? How thoughtful is it? If and when this combination is achieved, what effects does it have? and, Under what social and political conditions can any of this be accomplished? In experiments that span several continents, Fishkin has, over the last twenty years, used deliberative polling to test its viability in deliberative democracy. Experiments in Texas, Rome, Thailand, Denmark, Australia, and China involved the public voice in addressing tough public policies. In Texas, for example, a series of deliberative polls (1996-2007) sponsored by electric utility companies and the Texas Public Utility Commission resulted in a series of decisions about wind power and conservation. This has transformed the state from last to first in the use of wind power. In China, where such a project would seem unlikely, deliberative polling has helped the government of Wenling City in Zeguo township make key decisions—with active public input—about what infrastructure to build.

In an era when policy elites are thought to be insulated from the wishes of the public, deliberative polling offers an innovative way of coming to public judgment. Questions remain about the practicality of this model in societies that are conflict-ridden, highly partisan, or have language barriers. Although Fishkin supplies data on experiments conducted in areas that face such challenges, such as Australia, Bulgaria, and Northern Ireland, we need further empirical evidence from areas where the social and political conditions make inclusion and deliberation virtually impossible. Australia was able to address critical issues affecting the Aborigines and other indigenous people through deliberative polling. In Northern Ireland, a deeply divided society, deliberative polling helped a scientifically random sample of parents confront issues of possible educational cooperation between the communities. However, these are communities that were ready to face tough challenges and make tough choices for the public good. What about communities that aren't ready? How effective is deliberative polling in societies that are highly partisan; where political elites take liberties with facts and

perspectives, where people have seemingly lost the capacity to think critically through issues, and where journalists have failed to be the gatekeepers of social values?

Deliberative polling offers a rewarding promise for small communities that attempt to make it part of the political process, and where the general citizenry sees the need for serious deliberation in addressing intractable problems. It has been tested in many areas with positive results, but questions remain about its practicality in getting an entire nation involved in a deliberative process, or its use in many regions around the world where the desire for political equality and engagement is hardly an option.

# AFTERWORD:

## An Invitation

By Deborah Witte

This issue of the *Higher Education Exchange* (HEX) carries the message of the work of National Issues Forums (NIF) centers (also known as Public Policy Institutes or Centers for Civic Life) to a, hopefully, larger audience. This volume is packed with examples of how the centers are engaging community, students, and even legislators in their work. The Kettering Foundation, as a research institution, sees the publication of these essays and cases from NIF centers not as the end of our research, but as the jumping off point for additional research. In other words, there is an active role for you as a reader of the *Higher Education Exchange*.

In the “Foreword,” David Mathews suggests that these centers are stepping up to the challenge of linking the work of university-community engagement to democracy. They play a unique role, he suggests, by fostering the engagement of citizen with citizen rather than simply citizen with institutions. The centers make us aware that democracy requires the ecosystem of civic alliances, social norms, and deliberative practices. The piece by Scott London provides an excellent overview of what the centers are, how they do their work, and the impact they are having on their communities and their universities.

As London explains, each center grapples with some issues that are unique to their campus, yet most share a number of similarities. Two of these shared issues are the university-community relationship and the role of NIF centers within higher education. While the essays and interview in this volume provide some insights into the issues, they also lead, more importantly, to additional questions to consider.

Over the next several months, I will be hosting a series of “Readers’ Forums” that will tackle some of the questions and concerns raised in this volume of *HEX*. Some I can share with you now, but I’m sure you will have others, too. Consider this an invitation to build on the one-way conversation we have begun through this volume of essays and join in a larger conversation

by logging on to the Kettering website, [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org). We'll begin in November with an online conversation about the university-community relationship and follow that with one in January about the role of NIF centers in the academy.

Here is how we've been thinking about the university-community relationship. Kettering's research over the past twenty or more years has focused on the disconnect between citizens and their institutions manned by professionals. Our research shows there are numerous ways in which citizens and institutional actors alike have tried to bridge the gap, yet the disconnect persists. We'll want to examine whether, in your experience, the university-community disconnect is real and how you characterize the relationship. Is the so-called "disconnect" between higher education institutions and communities a problem for the academy as a whole? We'll examine the implications of the disconnect between higher education institutions and communities for the civic life of communities. And we'll try to articulate how universities build democratic capacity in communities.

In January, we'll take up the issue of visibility of NIF centers within the academy. Many of the authors here would argue that their centers provide a space for community and citizen partnerships within the academy. They also acknowledge, however, that this space (or relationship) is often at the margins of the university and the center, as well as the work it does, is invisible within the university. Still others, though, embrace this invisibility as they assert it can allow for creativity and experimentation that can happen only on the fringes. We'll want to explore your community-centered work within the academy. Are you "freelance" or "sheltered" and what are the advantages or disadvantages to being visible or invisible within the academy? Do you have insights about how to make your community-based work more visible on campus and more integrated into the work of the academy?

I hope you will offer additional topics for discussion among *HEX* readers. We might talk about students and their involvement (or lack thereof) with community and public issues, or the evolving, highly partisan nature of politics and the implications for teaching citizenship, or the "time poverty" problem that is seemingly inherent in community engagement.

The essays and interview in this issue provide much to think about. I hope they also provide much that you want to talk about. This is your invitation to join a body of scholars who very much want to think together about how democracy might work better and the role of higher education in that endeavor.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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Michael D'Innocenzo, now in his 50th year of teaching at Hofstra University, has spent the last half of 2010 as director of Renew New York. Renew New York is a program that involves students and teachers from ten high schools who have prepared NIF-type issue briefs for use in youth and intergenerational forums that examine ways in which state politics and society can be improved. The project was undertaken with the assistance of the Hofstra Center for Civic Engagement, which D'Innocenzo helped to establish.

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David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, was secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Ford administration and, before that, president of The University of Alabama. He has written extensively on education, political theory, southern history, public policy, and international problem solving. He has written several books, including *Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools?* (NewSouth Books, 2003); *For Communities to Work* (Kettering Foundation, 2002); and a revised second edition of *Politics for People* (University of Illinois Press, 1999). His newest book, *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy* (Kettering Foundation Press, 2006) focuses on the relationship between the public and public education.

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