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A Crucible Moment and the Current State of Engagement: A Conversation with Caryn McTighe Musil

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This article discusses A Crucible Moment, a "National Call to Action" by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement commissioned by the Department of Education. The report describes a national crisis in civic engagement and calls on higher education to make civic learning and democratic engagement an expected part of every student's college education. The article includes an interview with the report's lead author, Caryn McTighe Musil, who offers her view on the current state of engagement in American universities, describes the process through which A Crucible Moment was produced, and discusses the concepts of collective civic problem solving and generative partnerships. I reflect on key themes from the interview and A Crucible Moment and explore how readers can work to improve regional engagement efforts on their campuses in response to this call.

Keywords: A crucible moment, Democratic engagement, Civic engagement, Collective civic problem solving, Community-university partnerships

"The agenda set forth in *A Crucible Moment* is huge, but so is the crisis to which it responds. To dig our way out will require everyone's involvement, imagination, and commitment."

Caryn McTighe Musil (Musil, 2012, p. 73)

This themed issue of *PRISM* comes in the midst of what is being considered a "crisis" in civic learning and democratic engagement in American society. In January 2012, the White House released *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, a report by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement commissioned by the Department of Education. The report, referred to as a "National Call to Action" (National Task Force, 2012, p. 25), comes in response to a "civic recession" (p. 7), a phrase used to describe a massive deficit in civic knowledge and public engagement in the democratic process (pp. 6-7). The report highlights a number of signs that emphasize the distressed state of American democracy: Numerous studies reveal that students from grade school through college are gravely deficient in civic knowledge (p. 7); voter turnout in the US ranks 139th out of 172 of the world's democracies (p. 1); income inequality between the rich and poor is increasing (p. 20); economic lethargy and unequal educational access are widespread (p. 21); and growing distrust in the government and Wall Street seems to be feeding public disengagement in the political system (p. 1). These troubling signs suggest that many of American democracy's fundamental tenets, which Brown (2011) describes as "institutions and practices of equal opportunity; limited extremes of concentrated wealth and poverty; orientation toward citizenship as a practice of considering the public good; and citizens modestly discerning about the ways of power, history, representation, and justice" (p. 21), are rapidly eroding.

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A Crucible Moment's authors suggest that the national decline in civic learning and democratic engagement[1] is exacerbated by the increasing perception of undergraduate education as workforce training and a growing disillusionment about the value of a liberal education (p. 9). They argue that the view of higher education as a site to train skilled workers rather than as a space to prepare responsible, engaged citizens has dangerous consequences for American democracy (pp. 9-11). The report responds to these disturbing trends by urging American colleges and universities to use undergraduate education to engage students in the democratic process:

> *A Crucible Moment* calls on the higher education community – its constituents and stakeholders – to embrace civic learning and democratic engagement as an undisputed educational priority for all of higher education, public and private, two-year and four-year. … Such engagement will require constructing environments where education for democracy and civic responsibility is pervasive, not partial; central, not peripheral. (p. 2)

To resist the rampant dialogue of workforce preparation and reclaim the civic goals of higher education, *A Crucible Moment* calls for the expansion of engaged pedagogies[2] that support "education for democracy and civic responsibility," as described in the quote above. The report emphasizes that civic goals and workforce training should be viewed as mutually inclusive rather than in opposition. The authors maintain that employers often need workers who possess the same knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary for a thriving democracy. These include: "effective listening and oral communication, creative/critical thinking and problem solving, the ability to work effectively in diverse groups, agency and collaborative decision making, ethical analyses of complex issues, and intercultural understanding and perspective taking" (p. 11). The report emphasizes that narrow training in a particular discipline or skill set is actually bad for the economy because students often do not gain access to the broad range of skills and knowledge needed to be adaptable to changing workplace dynamics within the 21st century (p. 12).

While acknowledging the immense value of the civic work already being done at colleges and universities, referred to as the "civic reform movement" (p. 8), the report suggests that these endeavors have laid a partial foundation for civic learning but have not been enough to foster a culture of engagement within higher education. In a survey of 24,000 college students, "only one-third felt strongly that their civic awareness had expanded in college, that the campus had helped them learn the skills needed to effectively change society for the better, or that their commitment to improve society had grown," and "only slightly more than one-third felt strongly that faculty publicly advocated the need for students to become active and involved citizens" (National Task Force, 2012, p. 41). The authors argue that the next decade of civic reform needs to focus its attention on the two-thirds of students who are not currently being reached or affected by engaged learning practices. They assert that in order to create a pervasive culture of engagement within higher education, civic learning must become a central part of *every* college student's education: "This report

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[1] *A Crucible Moment* uses the terms "civic learning" and "democratic engagement" similarly in relation to the concept of citizenship. They both refer to the role of higher education in preparing students to engage responsibly and ethically in the democratic process and to be open-minded to different perspectives and tolerant of others (p. 3).

[2] The types of engaged pedagogies the report refers to specifically are intergroup and deliberative dialogue, service learning, and collective civic problem solving (pp. 55-56).

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therefore urges every college and university to foster a **civic ethos** that governs campus life, make **civic literacy** a goal for every graduate, integrate **civic inquiry** within majors and general education, and advance **civic action** as lifelong practice" (p. 14)[3]. Enacting such recommendations will require higher education to undergo a systemic shift that seems daunting in the midst of an educational culture in which undergraduate degrees are increasingly marketed as pre-professional as colleges and universities compete for students with a myriad of educational choices. Moreover, many institutions do not have tenure and promotion or reward policies in place encouraging faculty to develop courses that promote the type of civic learning and democratic engagement described in the report.

Calling for this type of widespread reform within higher education has led to a number of critiques of *A Crucible Moment* and its aims. Finn (2012) suggests that the report is being used by the federal government, and the Obama administration specifically, to "push kids into activism." He expresses particular concern about the role of the government in supporting "action civics." Finn's implication that *A Crucible Moment* supports political and social activism has been echoed by others who decry what they see as the report's liberal agenda that encourages partisan divisions (Deneen, 2012; Downs, 2012; Flynn, 2012; Grabar, 2012; Schaub, 2012). Flynn (2012) presents a scathing critique in which he maintains: "The education promoted in *A Crucible Moment* resembles the activism whose absence in the lives of apathetic students has been long lamented by politicized faculty and administrators. Their solution to political indifference is to make activism a mandatory portion of the curriculum …" (p. 348). Flynn's assertion refers to the report's recommendation to expand service learning and civic engagement across the curriculum, which he and other critics argue reduces the academic content and rigor of traditional liberal education (Bauerlein, 2012; Schaub, 2012). Deneen (2012) and Schaub (2012) are troubled by *A Crucible Moment*'s focus on global learning and global partnerships, as well as the suggestion that promoting civic engagement within higher education could work to address international problems. Schaub discusses the "report's alienation from American politics" and "downplaying of the "nation-state" (p. 373), and calls for a form of civic engagement that is more patriotic and philosophic (p. 374).

While these critiques raise important points that should be carefully examined when evaluating the report and its recommendations, in considering this issue's theme, *A Crucible Moment* offers a unique perspective into the current state of engagement in American universities. Developed through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Education, the document constitutes the culminating report from a year-long series of national roundtable discussions that brought together scholars, practitioners, administrators, and government officials, and conveys a wide range of ideas and suggestions. I had the pleasure of sitting down for an interview with Dr. Caryn McTighe Musil, lead author of the report. Musil is the Senior Fellow and Director of Civic Learning and Democracy at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and until November 2012, she was the Senior Vice President of the organization's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Global Initiatives. She has expertise in curriculum and faculty development and has authored a number of other significant publications in the field, including "Remapping Education for Social Responsibility: Civic, Global, and U.S. Diversity,*"* in John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley's *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement for Democracy and the*

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[3] For a more in-depth description of the concepts in bold, see the chart on page 15 of the report.

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Transformation of Higher Education; "Promoting Universal Values in the Face of Societal Change,*"* in Sjur Bergan's *Higher Education for Modern Societies: Competencies and Values*; "Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility: The Civic Learning Spiral," in Barbara Jacoby's *Civic Engagement in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*; and *Assessing Global Learning: Matching Good Intentions with Good Practice*, among others. She was just honored with the 2013 NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) Outstanding Contribution to Higher Education Award. The award recognizes the impact Musil's work on civic, democratic, and global learning initiatives and women's issues has had on higher education (AAC&U, 2013b).

In the conversation that follows[4], Musil offers her view on the current state of engagement, discusses the process through which *A Crucible Moment* was developed, and offers ideas about collective civic problem solving and generative partnerships[5]. In the afterword, I reflect on this conversation and discuss how Musil's ideas, and discussions on democratic engagement and liberal education more generally, provide insights that can aid scholars and practitioners who may consider revising current methods and developing new approaches in response to *A Crucible Moment's* call to expand engaged learning opportunities within colleges and universities.

The Interview

CK: *PRISM* is running a themed issue on "the current state of engagement in American Universities." Let's begin by discussing this theme. From your perspective, what is the current state of engagement in American higher education?

CMM: Well, there are tensions caused by competing forces. However, in terms of looking at that question today versus 10 years ago, it's like night and day. There is so much more in place than there was before, and there is so much more evidence about students' engagement on campus and within their classes. NSSE, the National Survey on Student Engagement, is not really about engagement in the larger community, it's about engagement in the work students do on campus. If you put "civic" in front of the word "engagement," there has been this huge growth. Though many people in the field, John Saltmarsh being one of them, believe that the movement is "stuck" – that's the language he uses. Other people feel as if civic engagement is ready for the next level. I would say that the mood of the national discussions at the roundtables was not so much that the field was stuck, but that it was ready for the next level of thinking.

Some of the seeds of where to go next have already been laid in the work that's been done, because people have come to the end or to the limits of the concept of service. Service often gets us in the door and wins us a lot of positive responses, but the engagement that might bring a person to service is at a different level than engagement in the real, underlying issues. There is a lot of evidence about what

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[4] The interview took place in October 2012 at High Point University, where Musil spoke on campus and participated in a roundtable discussion with civic engagement professionals in the region. The interview material has been edited for style, grammar, and coherence.

[5] Collective civic problem solving and generative partnership are central concepts described throughout *A Crucible Moment*. Collective civic problem solving refers to the ability to work collaboratively to solve local, national, and global problems, and generative partnerships are robust alliances formed "to address common problems, empower people to act, strengthen communities and nations, and generate new frontiers of knowledge" (National Task Force, 2012, p. 30).

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we call "high-impact practices" that include things like service learning, freshman seminars, undergraduate research, and diversity and global learning. What these are showing is that student learning accelerates when students are engaged, and that student learning accelerates even more, as George Kuh would say, when diversity is an element in any of these practices. It disrupts the norms when you've got multiple perspectives and multiple people with different backgrounds coming together over an issue, whether it's in the freshman year or not.

So there's been a real movement toward campuses adopting a lot of the high-impact practices as emblematic of positive educational reform that contributes to learning – and there is great pressure now to show that learning is actually happening. However, these efforts have much less effect if the students do not actually engage with one another. So engagement then became the center of the question that we asked in the diversity movement. Pat Gurin used the example, "You can have books in the library and the best library in the world, but if students are not checking out any of the books and engaging, then there's no learning." And so the idea of genuine engagement has contributed to our understandings of what pedagogies make a difference, and that the engagement across differences was really an important practice. This type of engagement opens people's perspectives and tends to make them more aware of issues occurring across groups, and therefore they become more likely to get involved in civic efforts organized to address the unsolved issues.

The thing we hear most commonly is that engagement is valued but it is not a priority. So if there is some other value – research for instance, publishing that book – engagement can take second place. So people are really working hard now to try to have the accountability and reward system reflect that engagement is an important value. And the other reality is, whether engagement is really understood in the institution's mission – when the president and the ethos of the place begin to say: This is who we are and what we stand for. At this university we believe in engaged learning.

I think higher education has a lot of competing demands on it, so different institutions have different missions. Research institutions do focus on the research, and so the real questions are: Can some of that research be about questions surrounding engagement? Can the research be participatory research? There are a whole series of questions about what counts as scholarship that must be addressed before universities can truly engage.

CK: A central argument of the report seems to be that higher education is losing its civic role because it has become so focused on workforce preparation. Can you discuss the decline in the larger civic goals of American higher education?

CMM: I think it has been a long process. The careful line that we tried to walk was not to put [civic goals and workforce preparation] in opposition to each other. It is very important to realize the ways in which students, who have the vision of how to apply their knowledge, get out of college and become certain kinds of workers. We need to consider what type of people students will be in the workplace. One of the mistakes is to think that civic engagement is only about the things you do after 9 to 5 work, but it really can, and should, be about day-to-day life. We've created more and more pre-professional majors because they sell and bring in tuition. It is important to recreate the balance of things.

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What took away civic action in some sectors was the domination of research at institutions, which was the German 19th-century model that went from Johns Hopkins to Harvard to Wisconsin. Now there are those of us [colleges and universities] who are not in those elite who imitate Research 1 institutions because we want to look like them. We didn't pause to say: "What kind of research fits us?" I think that it is partly recalibrating and seeing where we went too far in one direction that shut off a certain kind of knowledge and learning and ended up shutting off the civic question and reducing the quality of the pre-professional.

One of the examples I like to use is the predatory loan fiasco that caused a worldwide depression. Now someone along the way should have said, "I can't possibly sell this to this couple because they can't afford it and keep their house." Instead, what you had was a system it seems in which people were rewarded for how many mortgages they sold and got big profits from it. Workers weren't asked about the civic consequences of their work, and when they got these bad mortgages that they knew were toxic they wrapped them up and sold them somewhere. There was nobody there evaluating the kind of workers they needed and the kinds of training the workers should get. No one seemed to be asking: "What are the consequences to other people?" We need to be vigilant, and I think it is the role of higher education to play that public role. More people are looking at what it means to have democratic pedagogies and examining what students learn from classes that actually give them the practice space to do some of this complex thinking, deliberating, having room to go out on a limb and seeing where their ideas go, having room to put their ideas through a lot of different lenses, like considering the ethical dimensions or the public consequences.

CK: Can you talk more about how *A Crucible Moment* was produced? How did this project get started?

CMM: It got started at the instigation of Martha Kanter, who is the Under Secretary of Education and is second in line in that office to Arne Duncan. One is always K-12 and the other higher ed. She is the first, I believe, to represent the higher education sector who comes from a two-year institution. She was the president of a unified district that had several community colleges in it before she was tapped. She is someone who has always cared about the quality of the education offered in community colleges, and she always tried to be sure that under her leadership, students got the full range of education that involved the same kind of broad two-year learning that someone in a four-year institution would get. She always believed that kind of broad learning that AAC&U calls liberal education would empower them more in their lives. While she fully supported the larger national narrative that focused on completion and graduation rates – one of the phrases often used was "cradle to completion" – she also wanted to place preparation for responsible, participatory citizenship alongside those other two goals. So she posed the question for us to answer: What do we know about what has been learned about civic engagement and how do we scale it up? She had implemented some of these programs and knew they were vibrant on campuses, and she wanted to know what the research said about them.

The roundtables took place in the Department of Education. There was always a member of the Department of Ed at each meeting to show their support for the project's goals, and because part of what Martha wanted was for us to finally have a set

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of recommendations about how to improve [the civic recession in higher education]. The Department was really taking seriously this evolving set of recommendations and saying, "How are we going to dig our way out of the very troubling state of democracy?" And one of the recommendations was all about what state and local governments ought to do, which is why by the time we released *A Crucible Moment*, the Department of Education had created what they call *The Road Map Report*.

One of the big findings was that everybody has a role to play: the foundations; the federal government; the local government; civic organizations on campus and off campus; faculty; disciplinary societies. A very positive thing that we discovered in bringing these series of roundtables together is that everybody came with what they were doing on their campus or through their organizations, and so we became aware of this huge network of people. One of the commitments was to publish who participated and for those representing civic organizations to include short descriptors about what their organizations did so people could see how robust and diverse the field is. By the end, however, we all agreed, "This time, we all have to put our oars in the water at the same time fully aware of the common shore we are aiming for." It was a very exciting process!

Every group looked at the original paper and gave feedback on it and offered a set of recommendations. And at each successive roundtable, we would share what the previous group before them recommended, so we ended up stitching a very long quilt. One of the challenges was that things got repeated a lot in different ways and we couldn't have endless numbers of recommendations. So we had an 11-member National Task Force (NTF) overseeing the entire process. A representative from the NTF was always represented at each of the roundtables, and together we would report back to the NTF what we found and what was being recommended. The members of the NTF themselves were steeped in very different views on civic learning and democratic engagement, so we had multiple points of view from them as well on the issues, which I think kept people saying, "It's got to do this too!" So it was an effort to try to create a report that participants didn't feel left out of. It seems to have spoken broadly enough so that people can put their arms around pieces of it.

CK: Would you say that the creation of *A Crucible Moment* was really a way of enacting the type of collective problem solving that you describe in the report?

CMM: I think that's a very good way of putting it. If it was going to be about democratic engagement, we wanted to have a process that invited voices, invited critique, and expected people to point out limitations. We tried to bring divergent views to the table and also different starting points – that was a strong commitment. I will sometimes say that this is the people's document, that it was very much rooted in the fields, and in the practitioners, and in thinking about the future of engagement. Ultimately, you have a smaller group who then puts it all in one document, so if you had a different person put those conversations into writing you might have a different document. We had a participatory process where people heard each other even if they ultimately might not always agree with where we should go, or where we have been, or how well we've done it.

CK: I want to discuss the idea of collective civic problem solving in more depth. In the document you argue that there is "not a shortage of individual acts of generosity, but rather of civic knowledge and action" (p. 8). Do you have ideas about why our

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society seems to struggle with acting collectively to solve civic problems?

CMM: Well, I think we have really have a public culture that, first of all, attacks public life and things that are done collectively. There has always been a very strong pride in the power of an individual to move in the democracy we created. But that is one of the narratives about democracy – individual rights and individual mobility.

One of the people who I thought was most eloquent in making a distinction on this was James Joseph, who was in the public policy school at Duke University and former ambassador to South Africa when it became a nonracial democracy. He gave a talk about the overemphasis on the individual and people who judge others on their individual morality. He said that we have a microethics vision but we need a macroethics vision. He used as an example the famous story of the good Samaritan who is walking down the road and sees someone in a ditch and pauses to help that person. And he says that this example is a wonderful act of generosity, but then you must ask the questions: Why do people end up in this ditch, and what are the big systems that are getting them there? So he began to question the quality of our life together. In a democracy it ultimately depends, not just on an individual doing their role, but on making the system and the civic life work.

When the first George Bush became president, he wanted "a thousand points of light," which was wonderful in stimulating individual acts of kindness, but what did it finally add up to in American life and in the public space that we all share?[6] I decided in my public role in higher education to work with others to make the public space that I lived in a better one for everyone and to meet more people's needs.

I think we are so cut off from each other in contemporary life. We are so very busy that it is easier to retreat to the individual nuclear family. I think there really needs to be a reinvestment in the public action that you do with others and not simply individual acts, because those are not enough to keep a democracy flourishing. You need a lot of resources to solve problems. You also need a lot of momentum.

CK: It seems that in order solve problems collectively, strong partnerships must be formed. *A Crucible Moment* refers to "generative partnerships," which you describe as "partnerships constructed to address locally specific but nationally and globally intertwining problems" (pp. 51-52). Do you have thoughts about what types of civic partnerships can be the most generative?

CMM: I think it is really the determination of the people from the ground to decide what types of partnerships actually work where they are. They can take a lot of different forms. In one of the charts describing the phases of citizenship [reference to the chart on p. 60 of the report], I talk about the different phases of universities moving out into communities. When you move into the reciprocal or generative phase, it really means you are genuine and determined. You are open to working together, which takes a whole other level of knowledge. It takes really seeking out that you have the right people around the table, more wide ranging, more comprehensive, and that the investment is broad and acknowledges the consequences on the community in which you are working together. This to me is the most potentially radical challenge to how

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[6] The phrase "a thousand points of light" refers to references made by George H. W. Bush in the 1988 Republican presidential nomination acceptance speech and the 1989 inaugural address. He compared volunteer organizations and clubs to "a thousand points of light." During his presidency he honored citizens with "Point of Light Awards" for their commitment to volunteer work within their communities (Points of Light, 2013).

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higher education organizes itself. If [forming generative partnerships] becomes a more common mode, I think it might help define how we would organize ourselves in particular locations and departments and would lead to cross-disciplinary thinking about what counts as scholarship and who will be part of that scholarship.

It would also help higher education move to project-based evaluation with students demonstrating through their work what they know, as opposed to evaluating the hoops or pieces. It is not that that individual work along the way is not important, but ultimately you want to say to the student: "How have you put it all together? Show me that you are a synthetic thinker, a critical thinker, a perspective-taking thinker." If we want the very high level of engagement when students can actually move from thinking about something to implementing it, there are going to have to be shifts in the kinds of ways we engage in partnerships.

Afterword

As I reflect on my conversation with Musil, several themes emerge that may be of interest to *PRISM*'s readers. While many of us are likely already active in the "group of trailblazing campus-based actors" (National Task Force, 2012, p. 44) that has "partially laid" (National Task Force, 2012, p. 51) the foundation for a larger national movement toward civic learning and democratic engagement within higher education, *A Crucible Moment* suggests that these efforts have not been nearly enough to create systemic educational change. As Musil mentions, the civic engagement movement within American colleges and universities has made incredible advancements over the last decade, as evidenced by the widespread growth in programs and centers promoting community engagement and engaged learning pedagogies; by the increasing number of journals, books, and regional and national conferences dedicated to issues of engagement; and by an ever-growing body of research supporting the positive outcomes of engagement. In the research on service learning, for instance, numerous studies have been conducted that reveal substantial benefits for the students and the university. These studies find that service learning classes make students more tolerant and understanding about issues of race, class, and gender and less prone to stereotyping (Astin & Sax, 1998; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Greene & Diehm, 1995); improve student retention and completion rates (Astin and Sax, 1998; Gallini and Moely, 2003; Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010); increase student satisfaction with the university and faculty (Astin and Sax, 1998; Eyler and Giles, 1999), and help students gain a better sense of personal and professional direction (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999).

Although the field has made these advancements, Musil characterizes a general sense that the civic engagement movement is either "stuck," or "ready for the next level." In the *Democratic Engagement White Paper*, a report produced as the result of a colloquium of leading figures in the field, Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) describe a feeling that the civic engagement movement has lost its momentum. Participants concluded that "despite widespread evidence of innovative engagement activities across higher education, 'few institutions have made the significant, sustainable, structural reforms that will result in an academic culture that values community engagement as a core function of the institution'" (p. 1). Musil and *A Crucible Moment* suggest that to enact the level of reform needed to make civic learning a central goal of higher education, many institutions will have to be restructured so that engagement becomes ingrained within the campus mission

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and ethos and incentivized in tenure and promotion and reward policies[7].

Even if we disagree with the idea that the civic engagement movement is losing momentum as Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) assert, or we prefer to see the field as "ready for the next level," the release of *A Crucible Moment* and its urgent call to action offers the important realization that higher education's national narrative seems to be moving further and further away from civic learning. The ongoing debate over the value of a liberal education seems to be perpetuating the crisis *A Crucible Moment* describes by expanding the narrative that undergraduate education should consist of narrow training in a particular skill set or discipline rather than broad exposure to a range of knowledge. As I write, recently elected North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory plans to propose legislation to cut funding for state schools offering liberal arts courses that he thinks do not provide workforce training, saying, "If you want to take gender studies that's fine, go to a private school and take it. But I don't want to subsidize that if that's not going to get someone a job" (Frank, 2013). Musil mentions that higher education has many competing demands, and ensuring that students are employable immediately after college seems to be taking center stage due to the dire economy and high unemployment rates.

One of the valuable recommendations *A Crucible Moment* makes, to which Musil refers, is that civic engagement should be considered a vital component of workforce preparation rather than in opposition to it. The report responds specifically to the narrow view of workforce training McCrory conveys in his comments, saying,

> Public leaders who believe that the "economic agenda" of higher education is reducible to workforce training also fail to understand that there is a civic dimension to every field of study, including career and technical fields, as well as to every workplace. Industries and services have ethical and social responsibilities of their own, and, in a democracy, citizens and community partners routinely weigh in on such questions. Workers at all levels need to anticipate the civic implications of their choices and actions. (p. 10)

In the interview, Musil expands on the idea that all workers have ethical and social responsibilities by using the example of the subprime mortgage crisis. Her comments imply that these particular workers, who she argues were not thinking about the consequences their actions would have on others, would have benefited from the type of civically minded, liberal education that *A Crucible Moment* promotes. The report includes a chart listing the types of knowledge, skills, and values students need for "Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement" (p. 4), which includes attributes such as "ethical integrity," "moral discernment and behavior," and "responsibility to the larger good" that seem central to Musil's example of predatory lending. *A Crucible Moment* agrees with McCrory and others that disciplinary training and specialized skill development are essential components of a quality college education, but suggests that higher education

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[7] Many reward and tenure and promotion policies count community engagement as a service activity rather than as part of faculty members' teaching or research, which often makes it less valuable, and many policies do not credit engaged scholarship as highly as traditional research. Traditional scholarship tends to privilege sole-authored publications in disciplinary peer review journals. According to Saltmarsh (2012), engaged scholarship tends to "value artifacts of public value, such as technical reports, curricula, research reports, and policy reports; evaluation by those in the community who are affected by the research and can recognize the data and findings as their own, value them in their own terms, and use as they see fit; and collaborative knowledge generation" (p. XIV).

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needs to be more diligent in offering the types of educational experiences that will allow students to develop critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and the ability to work with diverse partners to make decisions and solve problems, among the many other attributes listed in the chart (p. 4).

Brown (2011) equates the declining access to a liberal arts education within public universities to the crisis in democracy *A Crucible Moment* describes. She suggests that by devaluing liberal education, these institutions are retreating from "the value of a citizenry educated for democracy, that is, for governing together, and from the idea that education offers the prospect of intrinsically richer and more gratifying lives, along with an enhanced capacity to participate in public life and contribute to the public good" (p. 28). Brown's claim supports the view that strong liberal education benefits democracy by creating a more responsible, engaged citizenry, an idea echoed in several critiques of *A Crucible Moment*. Flynn (2012) maintains that "True teaching for democracy would mean a liberal arts education. Instruction in what Matthew Arnold dubbed 'the best in what has been thought and said' prepares a student to become a citizen" (p. 350). Schaub (2012) argues that "civic education must be interwoven with a truly liberal education" (p. 375), which she specifies as a liberal education in the Socratic sense of possessing free, critical thinking and the ability to question one's beliefs, values, and larger social structures.

A key distinction between these authors' views of liberal education and the one supported by *A Crucible Moment* and the AAC&U is the focus on civic engagement. The AAC&U defines liberal education as "a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of value, ethics, and civic engagement" (AAC&U, 2013a). Within the organization's literature, liberal education has become connected with engaged learning practices, such as the high-impact practices to which Musil refers. Service learning in particular has gained growing attention as a "movement that seeks to link liberal education and civic engagement" (Rhoads, 2003, p. 25). Rhoads (2003) argues that the academy needs to rethink traditional models of liberal education to incorporate civic engagement and suggests this integration will better support students in becoming engaged citizens. He describes the relationship between liberal education and civic engagement, which he associates closely with the service learning movement:

> While liberal education and civic engagement both suggest a view of citizens as actively engaged in public life, the manner by which each seeks to accomplish this goal varies. Liberal education focuses more on the life of the mind and citizens as critical thinkers; civic engagement often involves experience-based understandings fostered through activities such as community service. (p. 26)

A Crucible Moment and the AAC&U maintain that 21st-century liberal education should include the experience-based learning Rhoads describes. It is this reconceived view of liberal education that Flynn (2012) and Schaub (2012) dispute.

Many of the critiques interpret the report's recommendations to make civic learning an expected part of every student's education and to expand service learning opportunities as a call to engage students in liberal activism within the local community (Finn, 2012; Deneen, 2012; Flynn, 2012; Schaub, 2012). Flynn (2012) and Grabar (2012) interpret service learning work as detracting from the academic content essential to a traditional liberal education. Flynn writes:

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> If education really were best served outside the campus gates, why preserve the academy at all? Instead of reading books, writing papers, and discussing ideas, students could clean litter from economically deprived neighborhoods or perform apprenticeships with seasoned community organizers. This is what service learning proposes for college education. (p. 350)

And Grabar maintains that "Shortly after Obama's inauguration we began receiving email missives encouraging us to incorporate service learning into our courses. … Many of my students had difficulty distinguishing verbs and nouns, and so would have been happy to do such assignments and write 'reflection papers,' cataloging their emotional impressions …" (p. 353). Flynn's and Grabar's comments posit a view of service learning as volunteerism or activism that detracts from student learning, an idea that has been avidly argued against by scholars in the field (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 1996; Butin, 2010; Rhoads and Howard, 1998).

Service learning is an intentional pedagogical approach that involves students in work within the community as a way to enhance the academic content in a course by offering students an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a real-world setting or to have firsthand experiences with issues being studied. Rather than compromise the rigor of liberal education as critiques suggest, when used effectively service learning should actually strengthen students' understanding of the material and prove challenging for students who have to meet learning objectives related to the course content as well as the community work (Vogelgesang and Astin, 2000; Howard, 2001). The larger goal of most service learning classes is to push students beyond ideas of volunteerism and "do-goodism" and toward the kind of critical, synthetic thinking that Musil describes as students capable of moving from thinking to application or implementation.

While I think these critiques pose an inaccurate view of civic engagement, and service learning in particular, these perceptions are vital to consider as we move forward. Although the field has been working for several decades to professionalize community-based work and to distinguish it from traditional community service or activism, the critiques of *A Crucible Moment* suggest that many outsiders still perceive our work in these ways. A key idea that has emerged from conversations in the field surrounding democratic engagement is that the general use of the term "engagement" to describe work being done in partnership with universities and communities focuses too much on the concept of physical space, i.e., communities surrounding institutions, and therefore subordinates the larger purposes for and processes through which engagement is enacted. Scholars suggest that emphasizing place over purposes and processes can lead to apolitical engagement efforts that are often ineffective in challenging existing institutional structures (Saltmarsh and Hartley, 2011; Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton, 2009).

A Crucible Moment participates in the growing body of work calling for the field to recast civic engagement as "democratic engagement," which positions the purposes and processes in relation to democracy and citizenship. When Musil refers to "democratic pedagogies," she is not only referring to courses that engage students in work within the community, but also to pedagogical approaches, such as intergroup and deliberative dialogue and civic problem solving, that aim to engage students in democratic thinking and can be incorporated across the disciplines or into the high-impact practices, which are not democratic pedagogies unless they are structured to be so. These discussions surrounding democratic engagement seem particularly significant as we consider how to

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move forward with regional engagement efforts on our campuses. Those of us interested in engagement and immersed in the scholarship have already been focusing on purposes and processes through our ongoing discussions about how to create mutually beneficial university-community partnerships and to value community knowledge alongside university knowledge, but I think that ideas about how our work supports democracy and encourages engaged citizenship have often been overlooked. The concepts of collective civic problem solving and generative partnerships seem to offer a language through which we can begin to discuss the purposes and processes of engagement more democratically. We go through the process of building generative partnerships within our engagement efforts with the larger purposes of enhancing student learning and acting collectively to solve shared problems within our communities.

Even if the field becomes more explicit in describing the purposes and processes of our work, making the kinds of deep structural changes *A Crucible Moment* recommends to create a civic campus ethos will require buy-in from numerous stakeholders. I suggest that the difficult, messy process through which *A Crucible Moment* was produced can serve as a model for individual campuses as they work to respond to its call to action. If we use the document as a model, one of the first steps will be starting campus dialogues that bring a wide range of voices together to begin forming partnerships and considering how to move forward collectively to create a civic-minded campus ethos. To support these efforts, the Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP) offers grants to fund "civic seminars," which are designed to bring diverse campus representatives together to discuss the institutional civic mission and to develop a plan for further action. For readers interested in engaging a dialogue on their campuses, the AAC&U website has a number of useful resources on organizing and structuring these seminars and developing guiding questions.

A Crucible Moment seems to have created a new sense of momentum in the field. Campus Compact released *A Praxis Brief* (2012), which highlights intersections between Campus Compact's mission and *A Crucible Moment* and offers steps campuses can take to become more civically minded; Elon University's 2012 Civic Engagement Institute focused on *A Crucible Moment*, and the 2013 Institute continued the conversation by focusing on the theme "Becoming Citizens, Becoming Community"; the Bonner Foundation has developed a High-Impact Initiative to link civic engagement to high-impact practices using *A Crucible Moment* as a key text; and many other colleges and universities have held civic seminars and campus discussions, and invited Musil to speak on their campuses in response to the report. But much more work is needed to build on this momentum. I hope readers will take away from this interview a dual sense of accomplishment in the work we have done, as well as a sense of urgency that we need expand our dialogues and integrate our networks if we want to move forward collectively to reclaim the civic mission of higher education. *A Crucible Moment* offers a framework for describing to higher education's stakeholders how civic learning and workforce preparation can be mutually inclusive. As Musil advocates, our public role in higher education should be to train skilled workers while also providing the educational foundation for them to be democratically engaged citizens who think about the ethical dimensions and public consequences of their actions.

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