



# HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2011

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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 Deborah Witte

This issue of the *Higher Education Exchange* continues its new focus that began in 2010. The journal now seeks to more closely align its theme to the research agenda of the Kettering Foundation. As David Mathews explains in the opening article, the foundation has spent the last year in conversation and research on what was once thought of as our “public schools” work. Through the course of several decades of research, our focus has moved from schools to education to a current consideration of “learning.” While a college of education within the university deals with teacher preparation, Mathews suggests that every college within the institution needs to be concerned with “learning.”

Mathews begins his inquiry with the arresting proposition that “the real school of education is, in fact, the entire institution itself; that is, the university or community college as a whole.” He asks, “What might the implications be of taking this proposition seriously?”

In the articles that follow, several scholars and practitioners respond to Mathews’ question from perspectives within and around the academy. As you will read, engagement, transformation, and relationships figure into each response.

Frank Fear, a long-time pioneer in the work of civic engagement, suggests the need for institutional transformative change, and identifies several barriers he sees to bringing about such a change within a university. Rather than being stymied by these barriers, however, Fear advocates engaging with colleagues through a “soft systems” approach to change—or, as he says, “just doing it.”

O’Meara, in an interview with coeditor David Brown, shares her findings from a study of “engaged faculty.” Like Fear, O’Meara chooses the word “transformation” to describe the way faculty are changing pedagogy, often through research-based projects with students. She identifies several barriers to the work of engagement, including the insularity of faculty and their professional allegiance to their discipline, rather than to their institution or its community. Remedies include the creation of centers and institutes on campuses where connections may be facilitated among faculty who aspire to engage.

Practitioners and scholars Lazarus, Saunders, Tukey, and Fitzgerald introduce engagement from the perspective of students. They suggest that Sustained Dialogue experiences may help students become active, engaged, and effective citizens. They outline seven civic competencies that result when students participate in these dialogues on divisive campus (and community) issues. They argue that interaction—rather than action and reaction—is the essence of how relationships are changed.

In Bernie Ronan’s interview, he shares the perspective of community colleges that are also part of this civic engagement movement. Their roles as “tweeners”—bridging the gap between high school and the four-year colleges—situate them to promote and encourage congruency between civic skills and workplace skills. He provides numerous examples of community colleges that are trying to practice “institutional intentionality” in their engagement work.

In the concluding piece, Sara Drury reviews Martha Nussbaum’s book, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Like the other scholars and practitioners writing here, Drury explains, Nussbaum is concerned that higher education is failing to serve our democracy. Vocational skills alone, she asserts, cannot prepare the next generation for citizenship. She advocates a renewed attention to education that produces engaged citizens as well as productive workers.



# WHAT IS THE REAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION?

By David Mathews

Each year the Kettering Foundation reviews all of its research through the lens of one of its major areas of study. This year, that area has been the relationship between the public and public education. Our three periodicals, the *Kettering Review*, *Connections*, and the *Higher Education Exchange*, share this review with various audiences. The *Exchange* delves into the implications of what we have found in the research for institutions of higher education.

Since the focus of our review has been public education, it would seem that this *Exchange* would be about how colleges of education or programs prepare schoolteachers and administrators. That, however, isn't what happened. This issue examines the proposition that the real school of education is, in fact, the entire institution itself; that is, the university or community college as a whole.

What might the implications be of taking this proposition seriously? We don't have a preconceived answer; we are just raising a question. We certainly don't intend to join in making colleges of education the scapegoat for all that is troubling in the country's public school systems. We can only report on how we came to focus on the entire institution and not just the division dealing with public education.

As discussed in the forthcoming issue of the *Kettering Review*, the foundation has been looking at the public schools for decades, but eventually we found it necessary to put schooling into the larger context of education. And that shift in focus began to take us beyond the confines of any one department or college. Since our primary research subject is citizens, we were struck by how often people distinguish schooling, which they consider to be the business of professionals, from education, broadly defined. We also found it helpful to distinguish between the instruction of young people, which is necessary to pass along the experiences of past generations, and the cultivation of the ability to learn, especially the ability to learn from and with others. We came to think of education as the cultivation of learning. Academic divisions that deal with teacher preparation properly concentrate on the

role of teaching in the development of a capacity for learning, but every division of an institution of higher education has to be concerned with learning.

Where *does* learning occur? That question led us to look at all types of institutions that educate. And what we learned about these institutions made us realize that the institutions fall within the purview of a number of colleges.

Lawrence Cremin, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian (and former Kettering Foundation trustee), identified a variety of educating institutions in his three-volume study of American education. Cremin showed that the country has always educated through families, along with churches, libraries, museums, benevolent societies, youth groups, agricultural fairs, radio and television stations, newspapers, and military organizations. We found a similar perspective on all that educates in the scholarly writing of Hervé Varenne, who documents the pervasiveness of “education writ large,” as Cremin would say.

As we continued our research at Kettering, we realized that communities have other educational resources that aren’t confined to institutions like museums and libraries. Citizens have found these resources in such unlikely places as farms for retired racehorses. This led us to identify scores of educators who aren’t schoolteachers but who use local resources to educate. Some have educated through community projects, such as one to reintroduce chestnut trees into Appalachia; others have done much the same thing using a community-built fish tank on the Gulf Coast. While chestnut trees and fish tanks don’t meet the usual criteria for educational resources, the citizens using them were often professionals in other fields who did recognize that these resources could prompt learning.

It was only a short—but big—step to move from seeing the educational resources in a community to seeing the community *itself* as an educator; that is, an accountable political actor capable of bringing together all of its educating institutions, which would significantly strengthen the hand of the citizenry. And once the foundation’s focus included the community itself, we found ourselves looking at the many ways colleges and universities engage communities through agriculture, business, health, and social work, to mention a few.

To conclude that an institution as a whole is implicated in what happens in education and learning does not mean, however, that the influence is always constructive. The profound effect that community colleges and universities have on schools isn't always acknowledged because the influence is indirect. For example, higher education sets the standard for what it means to know. Its epistemological preferences are reflected in everything from testing to the standards used in accountability measures. Academic institutions favor an epistemology that promotes technical rationality, which has been the key to much of our progress in the sciences. But we have seen the downside of elevating this way of knowing above all others when looking at frustrations with accountability standards. These standards are based largely on the measurable outcomes that are compatible with the way technical rationality defines knowledge. Yet the standards do not necessarily reflect what citizens want to know and aren't always consistent with what people think institutions need to do to be accountable.

Higher education also defines what it means to be a professional. And professional practices and values are reflected in the norms for school administrators and teachers, including ideas about the role citizens should play in professional enterprises. From a professional perspective, citizens appear to be consumers of services, not political actors doing things that enhance the learning of young people. For instance, we have seen communities where the public has lost a sense of ownership and responsibility for public schools. Citizens don't believe they have ownership because they can't influence what the schools do; control seems to be in the hands of educational professionals. This lack of a sense of agency may have something to do with the power of a professional mindset.

Having arrived at a point at which we could see a community as an educator, we wanted to look more closely at what determines the way a community goes about educating. We got a clue about where to focus our attention from a report on neighborhoods in St. Paul, Minnesota, that were using local resources to educate. The ultimate purpose of the projects was to change the culture of learning in the community. So the logical question for us is, if higher education influences the culture of learning in our society—and

surely it does, often in beneficial ways—how does this culture compare to the ideal culture of learning in a community that encourages everyone to contribute to educating young people? We aren't sure, but the two cultures seem quite different. So the question about cultures of learning, like questions about ways of knowing and the role of professionals, pushed us even deeper into thinking of the university itself as the actual college of education.

The next question is, of course, how would an institution that sees itself in this way go about its work? Would it have a college of community studies that would include a department of education writ large? Or, would the response not be organizational at all? Would there be other ways to look at epistemological issues, such as the relationship of academic ways of knowing to public ways? (Actually, a great deal has been written on public ways of creating practical wisdom using the human faculty for judgment, and some of the articles have been published in past issues of *HEX*.) Or what about examining the unintended effects of professional norms on civic responsibility and action? As I said in the beginning, the foundation doesn't have answers, but this issue of *HEX* should be of some help to those who want to explore the proposition that the condition of education in America is an institution-wide responsibility.

# FORGING TIES THAT BIND: The Engagement Challenge in Higher Education

By Frank A. Fear

What would it take to achieve Dr. Mathews' vision? Despite the existence of a national movement designed to transform the way higher education approaches its public mission, there are lingering questions and unmet aspirations—a gap between rhetoric and reality. Closing the gap requires something more and different from outcomes associated with change routines used frequently in higher education. With *reformative change*, the goal is to address issues and problems, to fix what is perceived to be broken. With *innovative change*, the intent is to introduce new ideas to the system, ideas that often come in the form of fresh approaches, practices, and programs.

While each change form is useful and often necessary, neither form is capable of addressing Dr. Mathews' elevated image of change—a game-changing image of higher education. Game changes in fields and institutions take place when *new* rules are put in place, rules that replace prevailing understandings and practices. When these new rules hold persistently and pervasively over time, changes occur in two rule-sets. The first set of rules pertains to *what* work is to be done. The second rule set addresses *how* the work is to be done. When rule changes are sustained over time, *transformative change* results, changing the essence of how individuals (and institutions) think about, and then go about, their work.

As measured in academic time, a generation has passed since the national conversation began about transforming the way higher education interprets and undertakes its public mission. Back then, bold ideas were expressed provocatively about what needed to happen and how. The calls for change continue to this day; Dr. Mathews' paper is a good example. That tells us that transformative change is difficult to achieve, elusive in outcome.

It was twenty years ago, in 1992 to be specific, when I became actively involved in this work. I believed the engagement movement would be game changing in nature—changing the way we teach,

the way we research, and the way we view “public” and interact with the public. I imagined that higher education would change organizationally, too; we would engage on campus similarly to the way we engage with the public—collaboratively, and with less emphasis on status and the exercise of authority.

It was exciting to be in the vanguard of change—to be part of a new and different way of engaging with students, academic colleagues, and community partners. I participated institutionally, chairing a university-wide task force at Michigan State that reconceived the way that we think about and approach “outreach,” the university’s public mission as it was commonly referenced in those days. Rather than viewing outreach as a tertiary activity, the third (and independent) leg of the academic mission, we envisioned outreach as a form of scholarship that cross cut the academic mission; there were outreach forms of teaching and outreach forms of research, we declared.

I also reconfigured my own program of scholarship, which led to a completely different way of approaching all aspects of my academic work. With colleagues, we coined the term “engaged learning” to signal a fresh way of working with students, academic, and community colleagues on joint efforts designed to cogenerate knowledge and improve organizational and community conditions. We created a new program on campus with that in mind, enabling undergraduate students to be exposed to this kind of thinking and, through fieldwork, helping them apply campus learning in community settings. My academic colleagues and I (including students in many cases) made presentations about our work at conferences. We also published academic papers and wrote a book together. The work was transformative for my colleagues and me.

It was clear that colleagues around the country were having similar experiences; they shared with us stories about how they had reconfigured their public work. They talked about new programs, centers, and institutes, all grounded in new ways of thinking—including a new vocabulary—and an associated way of doing work, which was in every way “engaged.” Most importantly, we discovered a common way of thinking and practicing:

- knowledge was not the exclusive province of academics

*We were  
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old adage:  
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- learning with community partners *in situ* was a valid, important, and necessary means of understanding and knowing
- collaboration and partnership (with joint decision making) was the primary means of working together, and
- the norms of engagement with community partners included openness, respectfulness, sharing of power, and the resolution of difficulties through dialogue and joint deliberation.



These were profoundly new ways for us, ways that ran counter to previously held beliefs and habits. This new way of thinking “took us to a new place,” a new way of *being* as much as a new way of *doing*. I became an “engaged scholar,” an identity that superseded my disciplinary identity (sociology).

We learned quickly that our new orientation and practices were far ahead of institutional change, which we generally found to be slow and episodic, and less than transformative in nature. Change, when it did occur, was often framed in reformatory and innovative terms. For sure, there was targeted funding for engagement, change in selected institutional policies and protocols, and there were new engagement programs and initiatives. However, we found that higher education was not always changing in fundamental ways. Furthermore, many of us discovered that transformative change was neither the intent nor the outcome. We were living an old adage: the more things change, the more they stay the same.

As an organizational sociologist I should have known better. Transformative change means changing the heart of an enterprise, and that type of change happens neither frequently nor easily. For one thing, it requires large-scale acceptance of change in traditionally accepted, often historic, routines—changes that are as much political as they are substantive. Take, for example, the concept that the

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public is knowledgeable—that academics should acknowledge and respect that knowledge, working actively to help the public take greater control of its own affairs. Acting on that belief cuts against the grain of the superiority of expert knowledge—capacity that comes from years of education, training, and the exercise of professional roles. Likewise, institutions will protect domains they believe are rightfully theirs. A strong case can be made—the “what if” as Dr. Mathews describes in his article—of rethinking the entire university as “the college of education,” including viewing the community as a locus of educative activity. However, the conventional view is to lodge responsibility *in the field* of education: “education” is the province of certain professionals—those who work in colleges or departments of education—who have achieved the credentials to do this work, credentials that higher education provides.

There is a symbiotic relationship between higher education (as credentialing institutions) and the professions (as fields of practice), whether it be in education, law, medicine, urban planning, or any field or discipline. Higher education and professions work together to preserve and protect the power, control, and benefits that accrue from a joint relationship. Fierce resistance should be expected from attempts designed to render fundamental changes to that relationship. Doing so can redefine higher education’s function and reconfigure the norms that guide professional practice.

So, many of us experienced a gap between what it meant to be “engaged scholars” and what it meant to experience academic life in our institutions. It meant finding ways to fit our beliefs and approach *into* historically prevailing and sanctioned ways of functioning. I was reminded of all of this, again, on the very day I was finishing the edits of this manuscript. At a public meeting a colleague reminded me (and those assembled) that this sort of work (if done by faculty at all) needs to be done “after tenure, not before.” “Engagement after 40” was the answer.

There is really nothing new in this genre of thinking. We know from the literature on paradigmatic shifts that fields and institutions often borrow selected ideas in the name of change; but it is change that comes at the fringe—not in the core. It is the “both-and” of change as it often unfolds—things changing and also fundamentally staying the same, simultaneously. It is a way



for fields and institutions to adapt to pressures to change, but in ways that preserve the essential character of the system.

When faced with this reality, at issue for me was what to do about it. It led me to the conclusion that there is a difference between the work that faculty members do and how that work is viewed institutionally. With that understanding, I am now less inclined to pursue institutional-level structural and systems change and more inclined to simply work with colleagues—on-campus and off- —on public engagement. I have found there to be an endless array of like-minded colleagues who are inclined to work on joint projects. We just do it.

The most advantaged circumstance is when the work proceeds without the burden of institutional constraints, the product of pure imagination. In fact, the inspiration for this approach came one day from listening to lyrics that I had heard many times before without effect: the lyrics that Anthony Newley wrote for the acclaimed film, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. In the song *Pure Imagination*, Willy Wonka implores us to recognize that

*If you want to view paradise,  
simply look around and view it  
Anything you want to, do it.*

*Wanta change the world?  
There's nothing to it.*

*There is no life I know to compare with pure imagination  
Living there you'll be free,  
If you truly wish to be.*

People coming together and just doing it: I have found this to be a useful way to put into practice ideas that would otherwise threaten people and systems. It is a soft-systems approach, lessening the prospect of resistance and expression of concern. The power of approaching change this way is magnified when multiple and compatible efforts are underway simultaneously, representing an opportunity to seed the system for change, akin to sowing a fertile field with



seeds in the spring. However, diverse efforts do not always happen intentionally or even take place through concerted, collective efforts. Quite the contrary, this type of change takes place here, then there, often recognized only later as compatible changes taking place in multiple locations.

This happened recently at my institution. The executive director of the university's study abroad program recognized that over thirty study abroad programs included a civic engagement component. These programs were envisioned and organized independently, by faculty across the university working with community partners around the world. With the recognition that "something important," albeit unplanned, was happening at Michigan State—and with the intent to build on this work—the study abroad director invited those involved to come together and share what they were doing and learning. After a few sessions together, the group decided to organize in a book-writing project to document what they are doing, and to describe various approaches taken and lessons learned.

With this example in mind, I have learned just how powerful it is to adapt for use in higher education practices that community organizers use in community settings. Community organizers bring together people to work on projects of common interest. They do this because they understand the power of networks and networking. This work, at its best, strengthens the ties that bind people and sustains common efforts over time. Leadership, then, is not something that is exercised only by administrators who (with "bold ideas") organize change programs with goals, outcomes, structural protocols, and strategic plans. In network-based forms of change, leadership comes as a shared expression as together colleagues decide what they want to do, and then do it.

At my institution I have found endless possibilities to put into play new, often radical, ideas. Rarely, though, is success achieved when change is introduced as hard-systems change—through the administrative structure, up and down the system, in a way that I call "vertical change." To the contrary, by using a community organizing approach it is possible to move nimbly across conventional boundaries—to bring together like-minded colleagues to work on projects. It is "horizontal change," as I see

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it—spanning the university and beyond. Intrinsic motivation means that people come to the table because they are interested; the work is something they *want* to do.

The assumption I bring to this work is that hard-systems change often represents a frontal assault to the system, likely to take hold only in times of crisis. By the same token, doing the same work in a soft-systems fashion is less threatening, a potentially more viable way to put things in motion and keep them moving. A tipping point of change may result if, over time, multiple experiments are undertaken successfully.

The important thing is to keep transformative ideas at stage center: focus on ideas—not on systems or institutions—as the primary unit of analysis. Imagine how to put ideas into practice. Then, do it.

Anthony Newley had it right.

# ENGAGED FACULTY

## An Interview with KerryAnn O'Meara

*David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with KerryAnn O'Meara, Associate Professor of Higher Education at the University of Maryland, who has done extensive research exploring faculty civic agency. Brown wanted to learn more about the implications of her research for both faculty and their institutions.*

**Brown:** Sometimes we take for granted that those reading us understand the terms we use. “Engaged faculty” might be one such term. What faculty work is included when speaking of “engaged faculty”?

**O'Meara:** Yes, good point. Within the community engagement movement, scholars and leaders often use the term “engaged faculty” to mean “community-engaged faculty,” however it is important to clarify. This is important because not only is “community engagement” a big tent that includes service-learning, civic engagement, community-based research, extension, and many other forms of public service, but also because those involved in trying to transform teaching and learning to improve “student engagement” (meaning the involvement of students in learning) likewise use this term in national student and faculty surveys.

**Brown:** When you say faculty are trying to transform “teaching and learning to improve ‘student engagement,’” what specific things are they doing that have the potential of being transformative?

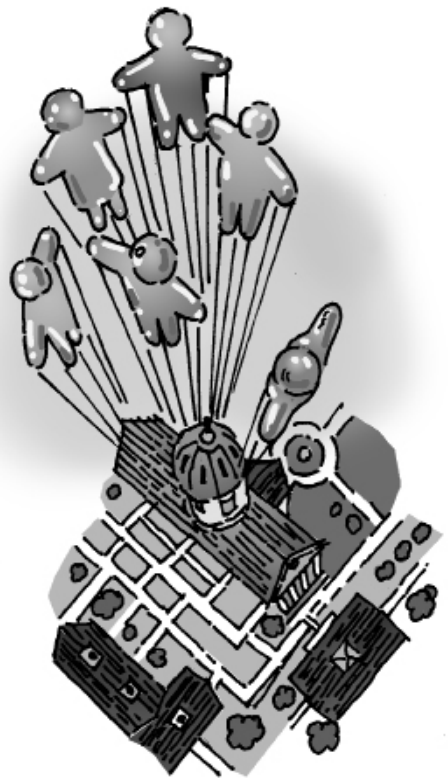
**O'Meara:** There are many ways in which faculty are integrating community engagement and teaching that are transformative to pedagogy. For example, many faculty are involving students in community-based research projects wherein they act as coproducers of knowledge with community partners and faculty. So, rather than being the passive recipient of knowledge from a book or lecture, these students help define research problems and participatory research methods, and consider potential dissemination and impacts. In this way they are seen as partners with faculty and community partners, with their own assets brought into the learning situation.

**Brown:** You have found, however, a number of existing “disabling conditions” that discourage “engagement.” If you were

to single out the most disabling condition, what would it be and why? And what is being done, or can be done, to overcome it?

**O'Meara:** In my research to date, I have found many very complex and layered barriers to faculty community engagement in higher education, even for the most committed. The one I have been thinking about the most lately relates to the ways in which the higher education market encourages faculty to withdraw from institutional life and from the life of a community around an institution. This kind of distancing of oneself from the priorities of the institution or community—from having local colleagues and commitments, and common deeply held goals and work—is really deleterious to all higher education missions, not just those related to community and civic engagement. The narrative is one in which faculty are encouraged to, and actively choose to spend more time researching and writing for their disciplines. Faculty are routinely told not to fall into the trap of entanglements that tie an individual to their institution or local concerns, such as committee service, sitting on boards, and so forth, because these will not further one's career or the institution's ratings in *US News & World Report*.

There is (ironically) research that shows that scholarship done in isolation from interdisciplinary colleagues and collaboration with peers suffers, so there is very little win-win in this trend toward isolation. I really believe that scholars should be touched by the institutions where they work, and institutions should be places that feed creativity and professional growth, not places to circumvent experiencing these things. Likewise, citizens of a community want to work with faculty in a particular place and space, and it matters that they know that the faculty member is at least somewhat “grounded” there as well. Rather than faculty operating like balloons placed 500 feet above an institution, who drop down every now and then to pick up books and messages, it is



important that more higher education institutions think more deeply about how to connect faculty to their places and not encourage them to act as if it doesn't matter what institution they work at or where it is located.

**Brown:** Are institutions running so scared or so eager to improve their rankings that faculty are actively discouraged from being “engaged”?

**O'Meara:** Certainly institutional type plays a key role so I'm not talking here about community colleges and less selective four-year colleges and universities. More of my interviews have been with faculty in research and doctoral universities—selective, comprehensive and liberal arts colleges—where I did talk to many engaged faculty who are concerned about the role of ranking systems on institutional priorities and reward systems. I actually teach a course on ranking systems and what we see is that this is also a global phenomenon. In one university for example, the president was so intent on improving in the Academic Ranking of World Universities conducted by Shanghai Jiao Tong University that he placed a large hot air balloon over the entrance to the campus noting their placement and changing the number each year to note their rise in the rankings. While a hot air balloon with *US News & World Report* rankings is not hanging over the entrance to most US colleges and universities, it is an interesting visual for the general sense that many faculty have that rankings are a central and important influence on decision-making—whether financial or for promotion, tenure, or admissions criteria. The criteria for some of the most popular rankings favor the counting of citations in traditional research outlets—not social relevance of work or local impact. While this may not cause faculty to run scared, it certainly creates a sense that faculty work that does not advance strategic objectives to improve in rankings will either be less valued, or must produce some other kind of currency to be deemed as worthy.

**Brown:** What kind of currency would that be?

**O'Meara:** Such currency might come from the strategic importance of local university partnerships, outstanding teaching evaluations, or external funding.

**Brown:** You have given considerable attention to exploring “faculty civic agency”—the feeling that faculty members can

accomplish their engagement goals—and what supports it. Does such “agency” depend on being part of a collective, institutional effort, or can it be realized by an individual alone?

**O’Meara:** It can be realized alone. That is, each individual can assume agency for an interest or set of goals that are specific to them, as well as being part of a collective in achieving a set of goals. Faculty who felt that they were part of a national or international network of engaged faculty members clearly took sustenance and even gained a sense of agency from that knowledge. However, being part of a national network did not help them very much at their own institution. In navigating institutional reward systems or obtaining resources, these collectives do not have as much voice in institutional decision-making. In these cases faculty had to find ways to assume agency in the absence of a collective of individuals wanting similar goals at their institution.

**Brown:** Does that reflect a current failure of institutions to “set the table,” as you put it, in helping their respective faculties realize a sense of “agency”?

**O’Meara:** In part, this may reflect my sample and in part, it is a failure on the part of many institutions to set the table. Most of my research has been done with individuals who are the most involved in community engagement of all faculty at their institution. Not unlike being the best teacher, or the Nobel Prize-winning scientist, being the most engaged can put them in a lonely place. They often did not have other colleagues around who understood their work. Faculty in my study noted a desire for more intellectual community at their institution in general and in particular with those involved in community engagement at a deeper level. I think these faculty were very good mentors, and very good at connecting to other engaged faculty on their campus who were working with the same community partners on other projects. They noted, however, that they wished there were more such faculty and that there were more spaces and time on their campus to create those dialogues and community.

There is a rich tradition, of course, in feminism, African American studies, labor unions, and many other civil rights traditions of collective effort to enhance a group’s sense of agency and to achieve group goals. What strikes me as different among many of the faculty

I interviewed is that they are often part of multiple collectives working on different issues, which is rich for their life and goals but can mean it is harder to gain that kind of collective support for specific initiatives in their respective universities.

This is where institutions could really set the table better. They could facilitate connections on campus and support linkages with engaged faculty at other institutions via learning-community types of programs, bring other engaged faculty to campus to give talks and do some time in residence, and create some connections using technology. These kinds of intentional efforts would go a long way toward signaling that the institution values community engagement and engaged scholars and wants to invest in their professional growth.

**Brown:** You have found that “intellectual community” is important but often lacking on a campus. Could you say more about how such “community” relates to a “culture of engagement,” and the importance you have found of “micro experiences,” as opposed to an institutional systems approach.

**O’Meara:** I think an important future area for research and practice is to consider the kinds of ingredients that go into a work environment that grows civic and community engagement in a faculty member’s life. There is one example from an interview I did where the junior faculty member’s department gets together for a sort of mini-retreat at the beginning of each school year. Faculty then lay out some of their chief community engagement, teaching, and research goals for each other and receive feedback. This environment creates a constructive form of feedback in a nurturing environment where there is also accountability to an intellectual community for achieving those goals. Campus Compact has long supported engaged departments, where entire departments participate in curricular reform and take on partners collectively. These are the kinds of rich cases we want to study, because it is likely that community engagement grows more quickly and deeply in such places, attracts more external funding, and in general has higher impact.

**Brown:** The mini-retreat and an entire department engaged in curricular reform are interesting examples of a “micro experience.” Are there others?

**O’Meara:** I think interdisciplinary applied centers can accomplish similar ends. Cathy Burack and colleagues wrote some time



ago about the power of enclaves in universities to accomplish significant projects together. By enclaves, they meant centers, institutes, and small departments wherein a group of like-minded faculty can sponsor common courses, research projects, and outreach projects that meet community needs.

The mutual support and learning available to faculty within such groups can be extensive and valuable.

**Brown:** How does the faculty work of engaged faculty differ depending on an academic's discipline or institutional affiliation?

**O'Meara:** What we know so far from national surveys of higher education faculty, as well as from hundreds of interviews and case studies, is that community engagement exists in every possible discipline and institutional type. At the same time, it is more prevalent in some disciplines (such as the social sciences and professional schools) than others (such as the natural sciences). Likewise, it is more common in some institutional types than others and in certain forms in those places. For example, service-learning, as a form of community engagement, is more common in liberal arts colleges and community colleges than community-based research, and participatory action research is more common in graduate programs in doctoral comprehensives.

Two of the major reasons faculty give for the “why” of their motivation for community engagement are teaching goals and their identity as members of a discipline with a public purpose. For example, many faculty whose teaching uses thicker forms of service-learning do so because they want their students to develop a greater appreciation for diversity, or develop specific professional skills employed in diverse community settings. Likewise, I have often heard faculty explain their community engagement work by prefacing it with, “as a biologist” or “as an engineer” or “as an urban planner.” The faculty member then goes on to explain that their academic identity is part of their role to engage with the public—whether through teaching, research, or outreach.

**Brown:** Would you say from your research that the disciplinary centeredness of faculty members' community engagement is more common than any other grounds for their engagement?

**O'Meara:** You know, that is actually a complicated question. I have had the privilege in much of my work to interview faculty

*Community engagement exists in every possible discipline and institutional type.*

exemplars in this work, who received, or were the one person from their institution nominated for, a national community engagement award. One of the things that has struck me about these faculty exemplars is their thick use of theory and/or thick use of research methods alongside community partners and students to accomplish goals. Professionally, I worked as a director of service-learning and community engagement for some time, helping individual faculty create projects. In many of these cases, where faculty were just getting started or getting involved in service-learning projects as an “add-on,” the projects were not designed with great forethought about what the tradition of a discipline or field like sociology, public health, human development, engineering, or education had to offer a particular social problem. In my research here I found exemplary faculty who were very much employing the tools of their disciplines in their public and engaged work. For example, a faculty member who studied urban planning and community development was clearly using this socialization and training to inform her part of a joint project. Also, she had been attracted to urban planning and community development as a field because of the potential it offered to help solve public problems. Therefore, she graduated from her doctoral program with a sense that to be an urban planner or a scholar in this field meant to be involved in community work, not separated from it.

The projects of these faculty exemplars seemed so much richer when informed by their disciplines and fields. By richer I mean they were extremely intentional about what short term and long term outcomes they were seeking, and the plan to get there. They had working theories about process and product from the beginning to the end that were in play, and consequently the results had high impact.

**Brown:** Please go on.

**O’Meara:** I do want to clarify that I don’t think these faculty exemplar were involved in their community engagement primarily because of their discipline. They were each highly agentic people who, I believe, would have found other ways to become engaged, using other tools and methods, if they had not become scholars in universities. Also, they were not engaging in what Harry Boyte and others have referred to as a technocracy wherein they marched into

communities and suggested they had expertise in engineering or education and thus should lead all public projects. Rather, they considered their expertise, as Boyte has noted, as more of an ingredient in a collective effort. So in the mix might be a citizen with local knowledge of city council and political savvy. That would be one key ingredient. There might be great passion about a river clean-up among children who play near a stream—that passion becomes another ingredient. And there might be knowledge of the kinds of materials needed for a proper clean-up by the environmental sciences professor as yet another ingredient.

In this way, discipline and field are tools that exemplary engaged faculty are using in the service of a problem, much like a doctor might use her training to diagnose, but which might be only one piece of how the patient gets better.

**Brown:** One of your findings has been the importance of “autonomy” to faculty members. Of course, this can be important whether or not a faculty member is also “engaged.” How does the importance of autonomy relate specifically to an academic seeking to be engaged?

**O’Meara:** I think the best way to think of autonomy is as fertilizer, or one of the conditions of a good incubator. There are many aspects of what has traditionally been the tenure track faculty career that do not fuel or generate a good work environment for creative engagement. However, in my interviews, community-engaged faculty found that the autonomy, which they had in deciding how to design their classes, research agenda, and general sense of commitments at the institution, really fueled their community engagement. Autonomy is one of the key aspects of the job that most faculty report satisfaction with. It is also perhaps a general job characteristic that creates a foundation from which to then be creative.

**Brown:** Can the sense of autonomy be nourished as much by the indifference of administrators as by their active support of engaged faculty?

*In this way, discipline and field are tools that exemplary engaged faculty are using in the service of a problem.*



**O'Meara:** I think there is a career stage element to it. I heard mostly from younger scholars about a generative kind of freedom given to them in early career to design teaching and research agendas toward community engagement. So individuals they respected and who held some power over their careers intentionally mentored them and gave them this autonomy, which they needed and wanted and were grateful for. Whereas the full professors, who did not really need the administrators or colleagues as much for career confirmation, often said things like “they leave us alone, and that is fine.” So, here there was indifference with which they were satisfied. While indifference is not the same as support, I am also not sure they needed or desired the same kind of affirmation the younger scholars looked for.

**Brown:** In your work you have noted that doctoral training still emphasizes “traditional disciplinary scholarship.” Does that have to change, and in what ways, if we expect more young scholars to become “engaged”?

**O'Meara:** I would love to see reform of graduate education that places engaged scholarship at the center of how scholars are shaped and formed. This seems the most systemic way to increase faculty capacity and interest in this work. Scholars and policymakers who study graduate education have observed that the American system in particular faces a crisis of sorts in terms of recruitment of women and minorities in many fields. Retention, time to degree, satisfaction, and job placement remain problematic. Integrating community engagement into doctoral programs could simultaneously prepare future faculty to make concrete linkages between their teaching, research, and public work, and improve the American graduate system. For example, women and minorities self-report on surveys being disproportionately interested in areas of study with direct social relevance, which is why NSF has encouraged the disciplines in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to integrate community engagement into their undergraduate and graduate programs to attract these groups.

On the other end of the doctoral career, there are many more Ph.Ds graduating than there are academic jobs. Yet, it could be argued that we have even greater need for scholars trained to be innovative in “social and human relations” and in the design of

solutions to complex problems than we did when the Truman Commission called for such graduates over a half century ago. Graduates who left doctoral programs dually trained in traditional and applied and engaged research methods could become social entrepreneurs.

They could become a part of or create organizations that serve environmental, educational, and democratic purposes. While this may sound idealistic, I think graduate education will need to be reformed significantly in the next 10-15 years anyway. Decreasing public support for higher education and time-to-degrees of 8-12 years are not sustainable, especially given the job market at the other end.

Community engagement could become a key ingredient in the re-envisioning of the purposes and processes of doctoral education.

**Brown:** Thank you, KerryAnn. We look forward to learning more as you continue your ambitious and important research.

*Graduate education will need to be reformed significantly in the next 10-15 years.*

# STUDENT-LED CIVIC EDUCATION: A Different Way of Knowing

By Harold H. Saunders, David Tukey, Amy Lazarus,  
and Rhonda Fitzgerald

More than a decade ago at a student leadership conference, participants were urged to press their universities' administrations to address racism by creating more centers or courses on African American studies. One student replied, "We already have good courses, but they just provide the sociologists', the political scientists', or the psychologists' approaches. On my campus, we're experimenting with a different way of knowing. We're learning about racism from each other's experience. We engage in sustained dialogues that surface racism's day-to-day forms and provide spaces to talk about them deeply and honestly."

While African American history, constitutional law, democratic thought and politics, and more are taught well in the classroom, we suggest that the capacities that mark active and effective citizens in a democracy are learned most tellingly through experience.

Our country is deeply and angrily divided. Many Americans struggle with the challenge of restoring civil and productive discourse to our public life. A related concern is the debate in higher education about how most effectively to prepare students for a constructive role in our body politic. We offer three thoughts.

First, citizenship may be learned more effectively through carefully designed experience than in the classroom.

Second, we might better prepare tomorrow's citizens if we named precisely the arts and practices that "civic education" must teach.

Third, Sustained Dialogue® provides a systematic, disciplined, student-led process for learning through experience—"a different way of knowing"—to make "difference" a source of strength rather than a cause for confrontation. Sustained Dialogue is the five-stage dialogue-to-action peace process that transforms relationships and designs change in communities. Hal Saunders' experience as former Assistant Secretary of State under Henry Kissinger, mediating five Arab-Israeli agreements in six years, including the Camp David

accords in 1978 and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, provided the first insights that he eventually incorporated in Sustained Dialogue. At the request of Princeton students, Hal worked to adapt this system for young campus leaders.

The traditional paradigm for the study and practice of politics focuses on action and reaction around power defined as the ability to coerce or control. Confrontation is the medium of political exchange. Some students outside the classroom are being introduced to a paradigm that focuses on interaction. It focuses on transforming destructive relationships into constructive relationships. Power is generated by citizens' capacity to work together. It is defined as the capacity to influence the course of events.

For a century, physical and life scientists have been working from a post-Newtonian world view that focuses not on action and reaction but on a cumulative, multilevel, open-ended process of continuous interaction as the essence of change and of relationship. Citizens must be able to relate to the experiences of peers in order to be successful and effective in engaging in democratic processes.

An important component of such relating is empathy. This is no longer just an observable experience in human interaction. Neuroscientists can now explain the pathways in the brain that produce it. Researchers such as Peter Salovey suggest that empathy (which, in moderation, can be positively correlated with "emotional intelligence") has been critical for the evolution of our species and our societies.

Here's how it works according to Laurie Carr and her colleagues at the University of California Los Angeles' Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center and Neuropsychiatric Institute: When one person listens to another, a particular brain circuit in the person listening creates a mimicking "representation" of the postures and movements of the person speaking. This representation is then relayed to the emotion-rich limbic system, which initiates the feelings the person listening would experience if his or her body were postured like the person speaking; this is empathy. Importantly, areas of the limbic system are heavily regulated by a neurotransmitter (dopamine) that attaches priority to experiences accom-

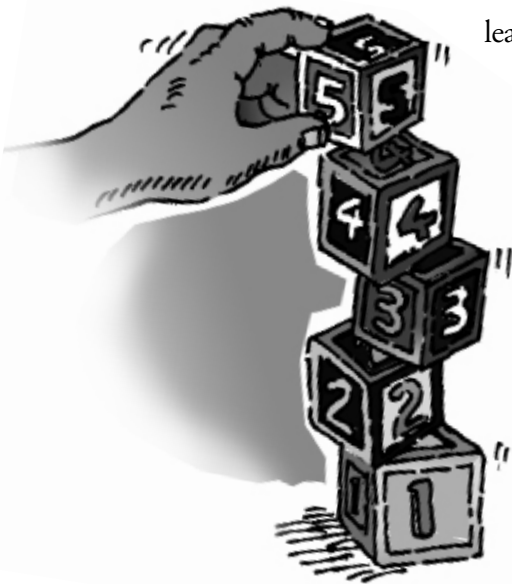


*Dialogue is experienced when individuals listen carefully enough to one another to be changed by what they hear.*

panied by perceived value (often termed emotion), suggesting that experiences involving empathy will be tagged as particularly significant memories. Therefore, empathic experiences—a critical component of learning how to orchestrate democratic processes—are only truly encountered through meaningful interaction.

One avenue for interaction is dialogue. Dialogue is experienced when individuals listen carefully enough to one another to be changed by what they hear. Dialogue defined in that way is the essence of relationship, and politics is about relationship—not just about power. The concept of relationship also comprises identity, interests, perceptions, and misperceptions—stereotypes—and modes of interaction. It is dialogue that makes democracy work because dialogue is at the heart of preventing deep-rooted human differences from becoming destructive and developing mutual respect and shared interest to resolve differences peacefully. When sustained, dialogue can become a change process.

The Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN), now working on fifteen campuses to address divisive issues such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, employs a five-stage process for transforming relationships—destructive and constructive—through dialogues conducted throughout the academic year by well-trained student moderators. (See [www.sdcampusnetwork.org](http://www.sdcampusnetwork.org))



Sustained Dialogue differs from most other learning and change processes in two ways. First, it focuses on the relationships that underlie conflict and intractable problems, working with a carefully defined concept of relationship. Second, because relationships don't change quickly, it works its way through five stages, bringing the same participants together regularly. It heeds Albert Einstein's warning that solutions to problems are rarely found in the thinking that caused them. Dialogue enables participants to redefine problems, not in terms of their symptoms but in terms of their causes.



If we advocate deliberately creating spaces for systematic learning through interaction, as the students practicing Sustained Dialogue have done, we must define rigorously what is to be learned. We have developed a list of “civic competencies” to improve the shaping of those spaces and judgment of what learning is taking place:

1. Learning to learn from the experience of interacting with others. Developing emotional and social intelligence.

Classmates at a recent 55th university reunion panel were asked: “What did you take away from your higher education that was especially important for your later personal and professional development?” All gave credit to excellent professors and rich course offerings. But, all underscored what they learned in campus interactions. “This is where I grew up.”

Two members of the 5th reunion class were asked to comment. One responded, “The purpose of secondary education has been captured in the ‘3 R’s—reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic.’ For me, college had its own ‘3 R’s’: reason, responsibility, relationship. Of these, reason might be said to be learned primarily in the classroom; responsibility takes one form as responsibility to oneself for curricular learning and another as responsibility to others as a citizen of the campus community or as part of a campus project, activity, or team; relationships are built primarily through interactions in residential life.”

Sustained Dialogue graduates echo these sentiments: “Sustained Dialogue is where I learned leadership, democracy, living with difference, and dealing with government (administration).”

2. Learning the art and practice of dialogue as the medium for developing and conducting productive relationships.

One source of learning, of course, is exposure to great ideas through authors, teachers, and mentors. A second is, as Keith Melville, a core faculty of the Fielding Graduate University, says, “talking, listening, learning, the give and take of learning conversations.” To be sure, they can take place in the classroom, but some subjects are not easily or deeply discussed in the classroom. Students turn to Sustained Dialogue because it is

a rare space to probe “taboo” subjects deeply; nowhere else can they learn by probing experience rather than through “intellectualizing.” Sustained Dialogue moderators find that “intellectualizing” a problem in a dialogue group is often a way of avoiding its painful depths.

*Sustained Dialogue moderators find that “intellectualizing” a problem in a dialogue group is often a way of avoiding its painful depths.*

3. Learning the tools (e.g., listening, questioning with a purpose, dialogue, deliberation) and concepts (relationship) for probing and analyzing experience in ways that produce practical conclusions peacefully and civilly.

This is where the curriculum is most clearly set apart from learning through campus interactions. When the students at Princeton were ready to start their first Sustained Dialogues, they were asked, “Who will moderate your dialogue groups?” The quick answer: “No member of the teaching faculty. They would just turn our groups into politics, sociology, or psychology seminars. We have a different way of knowing; we’re going to learn about racism from our own experiences.”

“A different way of knowing.” This is where the distinction between curricular and interactive learning sharpens, where students learn that theory can come from conceptualization of experience as well as from academic analysis. A real contribution to a conversation can come not only from new knowledge but also from the internalization of an idea or data and from processing that against one’s own experience. David Scobey at Bates refers to this as an individual’s capacity for “meaning-making.”

This is also where a distinction between service-learning and Sustained Dialogue, for instance, becomes clear. Although students learn many useful things from community service, ultimately, their formal way of learning from that service is to analyze their experience under rules determined by their home discipline. In Sustained Dialogue, students internalize experience and learn from it in whatever way makes sense to them in light of their broader experience. They take responsibility for developing their own way of knowing.

4. Cultivating the courage to act fairly through interaction in dialogue; developing and internalizing a sense of respect for

others—fairness, decency, justice, right and wrong; honing the ability to judge.

Deciding what is “the right thing” can come from reading the philosophers, but it can also come from experiencing injustice as shared in dialogue. Many children learn a sense of fairness from their parents, or a code of ethics from religious teaching, or philosophical arguments for right and wrong in college. But, a working conscience is probably honed through the experience of interacting in a social context.

5. Learning how to create spaces for dialogue on difference and for the peaceful resolution of differences.

Learning how to deal with deep-rooted human difference seems difficult to learn in the classroom and is more likely to be influenced by campus culture, which is the product of how students interact collectively. One of the most difficult questions is whether it is possible for students in groups to think strategically about how to change discriminatory practices and institutions on campus, how to change the racial climate on campus, and how to change campus culture. The possibilities can be learned in dialogue among students. Administrators can be supportive, but if students don't initiate change, it will not happen. There are some things only governments can do, but there are some things only citizens can do—transform conflictual human relationships, modify human behavior, and change political culture. Inequitable structures that are currently in place were initially created by people. Therefore, if people can identify and challenge these structures, people can change them.

6. Learning to develop and present information about how members of a community define community problems, talk about them, frame options for dealing with them, and decide on courses of action.

It is important in an academic institution to learn appropriate methods of research and the capacity to marshal necessary information for resolving public as well as academic problems. Numerous methodologies for “measuring” public opinion are

*Over half of these students say that their Sustained Dialogue experience has made them feel more like an important member of their community.*

taught in the classroom. Again, however, we have a feeling that too little attention is paid to probing experience in ways that give meaning to events around us.

Our messages are more about how we want to relate to people around us than they are academic. How I present myself is a question of relationship, which will not be learned in the classroom, yet which must be learned to lead citizens effectively.

7. Learning “a different way of knowing.” Do I learn from books or from relating and dialogue—i.e., from experience?

Typical student comments in a year-end survey of participants in 75 campus Sustained Dialogues suggest their answer:

- “Sustained Dialogue is simply more beneficial. The classroom experience is helpful, but discussion with peers allows for better understanding. It’s more personal.”
- “In classrooms, you hear about the big things ... in dialogue, you learn about the small things that really affect people you care about right now. It’s much more powerful ...”
- “Personal accounts seem to carry more weight than something being broken down on an academic level where sympathy and individual experience are often overlooked.”
- “Experiential and empathetic learning have longer-lasting effects.”

Of course, these competencies may also be learned organically through a broad range of campus experiences, including participation in athletic teams, campus newspapers, work-study, student governments, and theater groups. But, in Sustained Dialogue, the learning is more explicitly related to transforming relationships, and how these transformations impact the community.

Within the student-led and organized Sustained Dialogue program, students are learning the tools that influence how they encounter the world after graduation. About three-quarters of current participants, moderators, and leaders say that they are thinking more critically about the experiences of others, and also

considering how those experiences might be improved after a year of dialogue about campus issues relating to social identity. Over half of these students say that their Sustained Dialogue experience has made them feel more like an important member of their community, and they are now more inclined toward getting involved in shaping that community. Nearly two-thirds say that after a year of Sustained Dialogue, they are more interested in advocating for equity in new contexts and that they feel more empowered to make a positive impact on their current and future communities.

For students leading the Sustained Dialogue movement, these civic inclinations become even more pronounced, with 83 percent reporting that they feel empowered not just to make an impact on their current campus community, but also on future communities. While these survey findings may be encouraging to professionals in higher education, it is also significant that these student perceptions seem to translate into measurable civic outcomes in alumni.

Dr. Ande Diaz, now Associate Dean of Students at Roger Williams University, witnessed the founding of Sustained Dialogue as an administrator at Princeton. Diaz's research surveyed Sustained Dialogue students after they graduated from the University of Notre Dame, Princeton University, and the University of Virginia. In her thesis, *Composing a Civic Life: Influences of Sustained Dialogue on Post-Graduate Civic Engagement and Civic Life*, Diaz writes that Sustained Dialogue was associated with civic attitudes and cognitions, as well as effective postgraduate civic behaviors in graduates' educational institutions and workplaces; in work on policy creation and advocacy; and in the challenging of inequities. The study confirmed research based on the Intergroup Dialogue model, and furthered scholarship on the civic outcomes of dialogue by finding that reported impacts of student-led dialogue affected the participants' post-college work experience, as well as their future hopes and plans. For example, a premedical participant now wants to enter public medicine as a result of his Sustained Dialogue experience.

In "Sustained Dialogue: How Students Are Changing Their Own Racial Climate (*About Campus* 11 (Mar-Apr 2006): 17-23), Priya Parker, founder of Sustained Dialogue at the University of Virginia and former SDCN Program Director wrote, "Important questions to ask include whether the institutional value of diversity

*Through Sustained Dialogue, students take responsibility for shaping ... the campus climate itself.*

actually penetrates into the student body, whether institutional values pertaining to diversity affect race relations in a positive and discernable way, and if they do not, how administrators can help change this relationship.” Through Sustained Dialogue, students take responsibility for shaping and reshaping their own perceptions of campus climate and shaping the campus climate itself. Sustained Dialogue is a starting point, offering students a tangible process for addressing potentially divisive issues, including race.”

Students—citizens—taking responsibility. That’s the goal of civic education. SDCN works with students, campuses, and communities to build the movement to engage and empower future leaders to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

In the end, of course, as one student wrote: “The two (kinds of learning) go hand in hand.” Nothing written here should be interpreted as denigrating classroom learning. But there is “a different way of knowing.” Perhaps that’s what is missing from higher education’s approach to civic education.

# COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND CIVIC LEARNING

## An Interview with Bernie Ronan

*David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with Bernie Ronan, who directs the Division of Public Affairs of Maricopa Community College, which includes the Center for Civic Participation. Brown was interested in learning more about Ronan's views as expressed in his study, *The Civic Spectrum: How Students Become Engaged Citizens*, and his work with a new national undertaking of community colleges—*The Democracy Commitment*—which he has helped launch.*

**Brown:** In Derek Barker's preface to your study for the Kettering Foundation, *The Civic Spectrum: How Students Become Engaged Citizens*, Barker characterized it as "a theory of change for civic learning." Could you say more about how such a theory enables community colleges to play a more significant role in helping students become engaged citizens?

**Ronan:** The theory underlying the current paradigm of civic education would seem to be based on content, on a body of knowledge that students are supposed to have, which arguably enables them to engage as informed citizens. *The Civic Spectrum* argues for a different theory underlying civic education—a developmental frame in which "civics" implies skills or habits (what the ancients called virtues), and that these are built up over time and acquired through experience. To the extent that this is a change from the current paradigm of civic education, it also represents a theory of change for civic learning.

**Brown:** I find your three dimensions of civic learning—"head," "heart," and "hands,"—to be useful prompts for what educators should include. With a bit of explanation about each, could you tell me what more needs to be done by community colleges to incorporate each of them?

**Ronan:** In my view, learning to be a citizen takes time; it unfolds over the course of a student's academic career and continues to develop through a lifetime of citizenship. Therefore, schools and colleges have a responsibility to actively structure and encourage a

range of civic experiences for students that unfold over the course of their time in these institutions. Colleges must “walk the talk of citizenship” so that students see reflected in their educational experiences the values of democratic life that the institution stands for. They do this through the creation and nurturing of the *polis*, the “space of appearance” that citizens create to speak and act together.

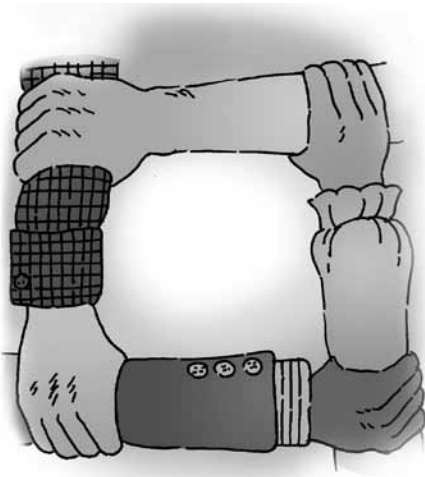
In terms of what is at stake in this civic education, I argue that it has three dimensions. Intellectual formation hinges on the growth of practical wisdom, which I term as “savvy.” While the intellectual content of civics courses remains important, educational institutions must focus far more of their attention on how savvy is built up, how students have the experiences they need to learn how to do things in the world. The linchpin of this practical wisdom is deliberation—the learned ability to balance trade-offs and explore underlying values that has long characterized the best of democratic life in our modern systems.

The second dimension of civic education concerns the affective or emotional, which I frame as “friendship,” following the ancient theme of Aristotle that “friendship holds cities together.” As Robert

Sokolowski puts it, friendship implies mutual benefit, mutually recognized. Arguably, this dimension of civic education—the bonds that form among those who pursue some civic purpose together, and how they discover through their civic work that their own good is actually the good of others—is the least explored in our schools and colleges.

The savvy acquired through deliberation and the bond that forms through civic friendship get instantiated in public action, the third dimension of the civic spectrum. I posit that this

dimension issues forth in the world through the flourishing of freedom, not freedom of movement or free will, but the power that comes about when citizens act together. “Freedom” is the power to act together, and it is the essence of politics, of civics. So savvy,





friendship, and freedom are what are at stake in civic education. Our colleges need a more robust sense of civic learning, and that would then drive enhancements of curricula and the creation of new opportunities for developing the intellectual, affective, and political skills to be acquired by students.

**Brown:** Are community college students learning the art of deliberation in their classrooms?

**Ronan:** The short answer is no. Not surprisingly, the pedagogy of the community college classroom is often not that different from the university. This is especially unfortunate since our classrooms are typically much smaller, certainly smaller than the university lecture hall. There is clearly more chance for deliberation in a classroom of 30 than there is in a lecture hall of 300. The paradigm in our colleges is still principally that the professor is the expert who lectures, and the student takes in the content. I am hoping to help educators see that this skill of deliberation (as key to the growth of savvy in students) must be fostered, and that opportunities for students to deliberate about issues must be built into the fabric of college instruction. Obviously, many faculty are already doing this. But I seek to help faculty see that deliberation in the classroom, as well as the opportunity for deliberation in the many informal settings in which students find themselves in college life, are a pivotal means of building practical wisdom.

**Brown:** Is deliberation being used when it comes to service-learning?

**Ronan:** Rarely. In my opinion, deliberation offers a vastly enhanced means of reflection on service, but the reflection needs to occur in a policy, or civic, context. This is why some are critical of service-learning as it is currently practiced in colleges. The reflection may turn the student inward to reflect on what they have learned, to assess how they feel as a result of their service. But it is critically important that it also engage the student in reflecting on the policy issues at stake in the service. It is not enough to just work in a soup kitchen. It is also imperative that a student reflect on why there are soup kitchens, why there is homelessness and poverty, and what role beyond service (such as research, advocacy, or political action) a student should undertake to address the policy issues associated with working in a soup kitchen. To the extent that service

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is a refuge from politics, to the extent that students seek service instead of engaging in the hurly-burly of political action, then such apolitical reflection does a disservice to the cause of civic education. If students, for example, were engaged in deliberating with each other about the policy implications of their service, they would acquire the civic skill of deliberation, which Aristotle found so key to the building up of practical wisdom—again, what I have termed “savvy.” Students would also discover dimensions of their common service that would likely not occur to them if they were just writing in their journal or doing their individual reflection. This obviously reveals a bias of mine, namely that service done by an individual, without engaging others, is a relatively low-level civic activity.

**Brown:** In a question related to deliberation, what is being done in community college classrooms or elsewhere on campus to “walk the talk” about students learning to act democratically?

**Ronan:** I love a term coined by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in their American Democracy Project: institutional intentionality. Colleges must be intentionally democratic; it is not something that happens by chance. This intentionality must be evidenced in how student government runs, in the way clubs operate on a campus, in how students are treated by their faculty, in how faculty engage with each other as colleagues, in how administration runs the school, and so forth. It is what we hope to instill through The Democracy Commitment: not just better civic experiences for students, but also an enhanced sense of the college as a civic agent that embodies in its practices the values and principles we as democratic citizens profess.

Much of the traction that we have gained through The Democracy Commitment has been by leveraging a “push back” against the vocational focus of so much of the current national discussion about the role of community colleges. Faculty in our colleges see themselves as being about more than skill training for the workplace. Having said that, it is also imperative that we as educators see that the civic skills we seek to educe from our students have significant similarities and overlap with the kinds of skills which employers need in the 21st century worker.

**Brown:** How will community colleges, in practical terms, distinguish between “service-learning” and “civic learning”?

**Ronan:** This is crucial. Certainly the paradigmatic civic experience currently extant in our colleges is service-learning. So there is a natural tendency when we talk about The Democracy Commitment to look first, and finally, at what a college is doing in service-learning. However, there are two challenges which we hope to pose to this paradigm through The Democracy Commitment. First, what other civic practices can (and do!) colleges encourage and practice besides service-learning? Our goal is to have an eminently “catholic” (small c) initiative, with a broad range of civic experiences and opportunities offered for students, so that colleges can pick and choose what practices they wish to undertake without valuing any given practice as better or worse than any other. In this sense, our initiative is Maoist in tone: “let a thousand flowers bloom.” Secondly, many service-learning practitioners lament the fact that their students’ service is all too frequently apolitical, that it stops short of policy implications and does not lead to further engagement in political work. So, we are hoping to move students through our initiative along what George Mehaffy from AAS-CU posits as a continuum from service to political engagement and advocacy resulting from their service. How can we make our service more civic, as it were.

**Brown:** Could you give me some examples of what is being done, or could be done, by those community colleges that are part of The Democracy Commitment?

**Ronan:** At a recent gathering of colleges involved in The Democracy Commitment, hosted by the Kettering Foundation, there was a rich spectrum of civic activity represented:

- Miami Dade College has offered almost a million hours of service-learning to its community, and is now hoping to enhance this activity with “civic learning modules” for faculty who are offering service-learning in their courses, as well as for other faculty interested in civic applications for their courses.



- Maricopa Community Colleges provide a variety of deliberative opportunities to engage their community, and offer a Student Public Policy Forum to train students in advocacy.
- Wayne County Community College District is actively involved in seeking to remediate the resegregation of schools in Detroit through civic engagement.
- Minneapolis Community and Technical College is partnering with Native American nonprofits in their city through community organizing, driven by credit courses the college offers on organizing and community development.
- Cuyahoga Community College offers students the opportunity to be trained in and facilitate Sustained Dialogue with other students, over an extended period, on issues of diversity and student success. This is part of a more comprehensive program of conflict mediation and peace studies that has national and international reach.
- Skyline College trains students in how to dialogue with others, and has held forums that utilize both dialogue and deliberation as techniques to address issues of concern to students on the campus.
- Macomb Community College trains students in how to utilize media for engagement and advocacy on issues of concern to them.
- Green River Community College addresses human rights issues in humanities courses to teach empathy.
- Gulf Coast College engages community and business leaders through forums to address regional issues and needs.
- Lone Star College—Kingwood engages college students in organizing with high school counterparts through Public Achievement to engage in civic activities designed by the students themselves.
- DeAnza College undertakes a wide range of campus and community organizing activities, ranging from political advocacy to diversity projects.

This snapshot represents the variety of civic work underway at community colleges, and likewise speaks to the need for a “big tent” approach to civic work in our colleges; one which does not prescribe any activities, but rather encourages a broad spectrum of civic work that colleges and their faculty can opt for based on their own interests and capacities.



**Brown:** Please go on.

**Ronan:** Community colleges are “tweeners”—they stand “between” K12 and the university in our P-20 education system. They have a stake in both sectors, since students come to them from high school, and many then transfer to complete bachelor’s degrees at the university. This argues for greater congruence between curricula in the civic realm, and for greater collaboration among faculty in high school, community college, and university. Further, community colleges can be especially fertile terrain for the growth of citizenship if they leverage their rootedness in their communities and proliferate the experiences of service and engagement that should typify their activities as community colleges. Finally, in terms of undergraduate education, the lower division is typically when most students experience the humanities and get their grounding in General Education. And this is critically important subject matter for the development of citizenship, as Martha Nussbaum argues so persuasively in her book *Not for Profit*. So, this means that community colleges are a fulcrum for citizenship development, as students pivot between high school and university, and as they cycle through the core educational experiences that have long been seen as essential to a liberal arts education. I love the phrase “civic arts” since it speaks to the artistry that is involved in developing citizens and to the overlay between what we have always known as liberal arts education and the growth of citizens.

**Brown:** You have also noted that civic skills and work skills are not that different. Does that mean that when a community

*Community colleges can be especially fertile terrain for the growth of citizenship.*

college prepares students for the workplace, it is already providing a form of civic learning?

**Ronan:** Bluntly, yes! Civic skills and workplace skills are congruent with each other. Here, I don't mean the technical skills—how to run a lathe, or program a silicon wafer. Rather, I see the congruence in what have come to be called “soft skills”—the ability to problem-solve as a team, to work together with others from diverse backgrounds, to negotiate conflicts and solve problems, to come together around shared values. And this congruence creates exciting synergies between occupational training and civic education. However, it also suggests that whenever academic instruction is developing the savvy, empathy, and political skills needed to exercise citizenship, a faculty member is teaching a student critically important employability skills as well.

To my mind, a student can gain as much savvy and learn as much about civic friendship in an internship in a company as they can by working on a community service project; it all depends on the quality of the experience and how truly “worldly” that experience is. If a student is engaged in a rote function, no matter the setting, civic skills are rarely produced.

**Brown:** Coming back to the classroom, you have argued that political science and education, in general, have become “sanitized of morality” with the consideration of values “marginalized in the classroom.” What is being done, or can be done, in community college classrooms to counter this trend?

**Ronan:** I think wherever our colleges actively engage students in grappling with the real issues of the day, whether those issues are local, community issues, or global issues, they are on the path toward a moral life; they are on the road to pursuing the “good.” This is not automatic by any means, and there are many obstacles that can dissuade a student from addressing the morality at stake in issues-based education. But, at least the possibility exists for a student to ask the big questions, the important questions: What is the right thing to do in this circumstance? How should we address this issue? What is at stake for my community in this issue? So, I don't argue that this marginalization of morality can be corrected only in active service; it can also be countered through enlightened, engaged instruction that helps students grapple with the real trade-offs

and consequences of addressing the issues that confront us as a society. Right and wrong is all around us, every day. And regrettably, it is so often actualized through evangelical harangues and adversarial politics, and so rarely through the rigorous and passionate exchange of ideas that political life until the modern age was characterized by.

**Brown:** Do those who teach at Maricopa provide the classroom support for such a shared, issue-based education?

**Ronan:** Increasingly, yes. Our younger faculty have a real sense of civic commitment, and are open to ways to employ issues-based education in their courses. Our adjunct faculty often do the majority of our teaching, and they come from our communities and our businesses, with expertise in local issues and a sense of commitment to the community and its problems. Efforts to teach about sustainability, for example, which are proliferating across community college (and university) campuses, are an illustration of a natural, almost organic response on the part of faculty and students to a civic issue of literally global importance. The challenge is how to do it, how to incorporate civic themes in our instruction in a way that enhances the teaching and learning, but does not detract from the learning objectives of the course. This challenge needs to be embraced by the professional development programs at our colleges, which exist to help our faculty improve their courses with new techniques and emphases.

**Brown:** You have said that more has to be done to nurture the politics of everyday life. But just how does that nurturing come about?

**Ronan:** Thomas Jefferson would say that educators are the ones to nurture. He argued that it was the role of education to inform young people with the skills they needed for a life of democratic citizenship. So in that sense, new efforts such as The Democracy Commitment among community colleges are a more recent revisiting of the age-old destiny of American education: to educate for citizenship. I love the metaphor that David Mathews has been using lately of the political “wetlands”—those rich associational spaces that are densely political, but most often are informal and very distant from our state capitols or our more “official” political spaces. Politics is everywhere. In our community colleges, the work of nurturing civic skills must reach beyond the classroom to clubs,

*The complexity of the world's problems outstrips the skills and expertise of professionals.*

athletic fields, student governments, honors societies—the wetlands of higher education where students come together. As Mary Kirlin, associate professor in the department of Public Policy and Administration at California State University Sacramento, says, this nurturance must be ongoing and consequential; it must be about things that matter to students and the world, not activities contrived or artificial. Faith-based settings are also key to the building of citizenship, since students gravitate to these settings because their faith impels them, and this provides a ready rationale for civic education and the development of the virtues of citizenship. Cities, schools, nonprofits, libraries—all of these settings are fertile ground for developing civic skills. I am clearly speaking here for a revivification of the ancient purpose of politics, to engage citizens in the work of the public worlds in which they live and work.

**Brown:** You argue that citizenship and politics involve complex problems. Isn't that one big reason why so many complex problems have been delegated to professional problem-solvers in government and NGOs? Can citizens take back what they have delegated for almost a century now?

**Ronan:** With tongue in cheek, I am inclined to ask those who routinely delegate our complex problems to professionals, in the words of TV's Dr. Phil, "So, how is that working for you?" The complexity of the world's problems outstrips the skills and expertise of professionals. We see this again and again in countless policy settings, and yet we continue to delegate these problems to the administrative elite. And how is that working? It is not that professional expertise has no role in the solution of today's problems, but rather that the role of the public administrator today must be to engage citizens in cocreating the solutions to these problems, working side by side with citizens. Here the language of the National Issues Forums is helpful, which refers to these as "wicked" problems—problems which defy simple, elegant solutions, but which require political answers, hammered out through the give-and-take of deliberation and the iterative process through which citizens have always collaborated and compromised to address thorny issues that confront them. This suggests that we need a new compact between public administrators and citizens, one that sees the work of citizens as the work of democracy. This is what the term "civic agency" implies



that Harry Boyte has written about—that citizens are agents of democracy to the extent that they are empowered to take on the work of political action in their communities. And this in turn suggests a different, more partner-like role for public administrators, one which works side by side with citizens in doing public work.

**Brown:** You served as Deputy Director of the Arizona Department of Commerce and as Deputy Associate Superintendent of the Arizona Department of Education. What did you learn from your government experience that informs your work now?

**Ronan:** My graduate education is in public administration. My time in state government taught me the value of public service, and this theme undergirds *The Civic Spectrum*. I would earnestly hope that these themes of civic work resonate with the public work of other administrators. Terry Cooper's work has been instrumental in my formation, especially his seminal work, *An Ethic of Citizenship for Public Administration*. Cooper argues persuasively that public work is the work of citizens, and administrators are partners with citizens in doing this work. The ethic of our profession is one of service to the citizens with whom we engage in public administration rather than as the objects of our administering. I have been actively thinking about the themes of public life and civic education throughout my professional life, and my time as a public administrator in state government helped to jump start this investigation. I see my transition to community college administration as fully congruent with that—colleges are, after all, public institutions too. Though we don't usually view administration of a college as similar to administration of a state agency, the issues at stake are remarkably similar: ensuring public stewardship, defining what a public good actually is and who has ownership of it, defining public service rather than private employment, and policymaking in public service. I must admit I am proud to be a public administrator, serving now in the administration of a community college.

**Brown:** Thank you, Bernie. Your example and leadership in the community college world is most important.

# *NOT FOR PROFIT: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*

By Martha C. Nussbaum

Sara A. Mehlretter Drury, Reviewer

What are we teaching the next generation? This question has sparked pedagogical reforms and critiques in education around the globe. In her book, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, University of Chicago Professor Martha C. Nussbaum explicates the necessity of humanistic inquiry and techniques to foster democratic citizens. Nussbaum characterizes the situation as more than just children being left behind. Instead, she alerts her readers to a developing “world-wide crisis in education,” one that she claims can only be solved through a renewed commitment to humanities-based education (p. 2).

She characterizes this crisis by the trend of schools moving towards technical skills and applied learning. Primary, secondary, and higher educational institutions are turning away from the humanities and arts, focusing instead on marketable skills that will—they believe—give students a competitive edge for job placement. This focus often involves the elimination of not only traditional humanities and arts classes, but also what Nussbaum calls the “humanistic aspects” of the hard sciences and social sciences: “the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought” as applied to these subject areas (p. 2). Critical thinking is being eliminated from curricula, a pedagogical choice that has potentially devastating effects for democratic vitality. Instead, nations all around the world are relying more on what she calls “education-for-profit.”

The education-for-profit model relies on the assumption that economic growth in a nation—as embodied by its technically astute citizens—is the most important reason *for* education. Under this assumption, a nation educates its citizens to grow their earning potential, which in turn is expected to benefit the standard of living through growing the national economy. This method of education, however, does not explicitly address the concerns of democratic education, and at times works *against* democratic practices. To

increase the possibilities for national growth, education-for-profit focuses more on skills (cultivating a good worker) and less on critical thinking. In fact, the critical thinking that is so necessary for democratic citizenship is frequently absent from these for-profit systems. Education-for-profit also scorns the arts and literature, believing that these fields contribute little to a student's training, since "they don't look like they lead to personal or national economic advancement (p. 23)." As programs in the humanities are eliminated in favor of vocational and technical training, education-for-profit ultimately leaves students lacking the background for the active, critical, and sympathetic practices of democratic citizenship.

As an alternative to the profit model, Nussbaum argues that in its proper form, humanities education becomes education for democracy. This sort of pedagogy does not prohibit profitability, but grounds itself in education as a process of learning rather than skills acquisition. Students in the humanities learn to think critically using relevant information from the historical and contemporary contexts, imagining the possibilities for the future. Humanities education grounds a student in philosophical questions that will make them a better citizen for democratic life. Drawing on the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Nussbaum argues that the primary way to transcend the tendencies of humans towards self-preservation, greed, aggression, and narcissism is to engage students in activities that demonstrate the fragility and inadequacy of *each* person, including themselves (p. 34). Humanistic education for democratic citizenship can develop students' capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of others, particularly those viewed by some as "least" desirable or lesser. It can foster feelings of compassion towards others; undermine tendencies of the majority to shrink from minorities and instead open dialogue; promote accountability by treating each citizen as a responsible, equal agent in a democratic community; and promote critical thinking and reasonable dissent towards authority.

But how do teachers begin to educate for democracy? Nussbaum acknowledges that the pedagogical practicality of humanistic education for democracy, especially in the primary and secondary settings, is often lacking. Most educators would be aided by a return to Socratic pedagogy, which aims to "stimulate students to think and argue for themselves, rather than defer to tradition and authority,"

and to explore and understand all sides of an issue. In the for-profit, testing-based education system of today, this pedagogy is under “severe strain (p. 48).” Socratic methods do not lend themselves to standards-based testing, as they often involve complex and lengthy explorations in argument. Furthermore, there are historic and contemporary skepticisms about the value of argument. After all, even in ancient Greece, political argument had a reputation for persuading the masses using reputation or false arguments; today, one only need turn on a cable news show to see the “talking heads” spouting their ideology at one another, rather than talking with each other about the possibilities surrounding public problems.

Still, Nussbaum insists that humanistic education can teach students how to argue and critique arguments in a manner appropriate for democracy. Educators must emphasize that political debate is *not* a competition to win, but rather an exercise in dialogue to understand all involved parties and discover the best possibilities. In this sort of instruction, students would learn the principles of argumentation in active settings, exploring issues relevant to their local, national, and global communities. They would be encouraged to have curiosity about multiple positions, and hopefully seek understanding and thus have respect for opposing parties. Students would also be encouraged to reevaluate, understanding that a solution may be applicable for a particular time and place, but may need alteration in the future. The “living tradition” of the humanities, Nussbaum writes, “uses Socratic values to produce a certain type of citizen: active, critical, curious, capable of resisting authority and peer pressure (p. 72).” Students trained in this Socratic, humanistic tradition of logical argumentation and critique would be more prepared to embody vibrant, active citizenship.

Ultimately, education for democracy stimulates the imagination of students by encouraging them to question, to consider what might have been and what could be, and to consider the plight of others. Nussbaum details how the study of literature prompts our ability to question, to reconsider, and to imagine. For example, she writes that reading about the narrator’s experiences in Ralph Ellison’s literary work *The Invisible Man* compels us to see the human situation with new eyes—to learn of the invisibility of certain races and classes in the United States. Our imagination, as developed by

humanities education, allows us to “develop our ability to see the full humanness of the people with whom our encounters in daily life are especially likely to be superficial at best, at worst infected by demeaning stereotypes (p. 107).” The learning objectives of humanistic education are not solely fact-based, but rather process-based. Democratic citizens, Nussbaum explains, need to come to an understanding of stigmatized positions—developing their inner eyes and inner hearts—so that they might better criticize poorly functioning aspects of society, and imagine solutions to public problems.

An interesting element of *Not for Profit* is that Nussbaum encourages humanities education for *global* citizenship. She draws on experience with the Indian education system to substantiate how different sorts of democratic nations all require the same humanistic foundations for healthy citizenship. In our globalized world, the tradition of inquiry and exploration fostered by the humanities becomes even more important. Nussbaum argues that each student graduating into their citizenship needs a pluralistic, globalized understanding of history, politics, economics (including historical inequalities of global trade), religion, and culture. Responsible global citizenship requires factual knowledge, but it also needs “the ability to assess historical evidence, to use and think critically about economic principles, to assess accounts of social justice, to speak a foreign language, to appreciate the complexities of major world religions (p. 93).” While she uses compelling examples from India and the United States to demonstrate why such pluralistic understandings are important for limiting mistrust and stigmatization in democratic societies, her analysis at times suggests an idealized public sphere, lacking personal, ideological commitments. Nussbaum embraces pluralism with open arms, failing to adequately address how citizens might remain grounded in their own religious or cultural traditions yet still be productive, vibrant members of a democratic community.

This book rings familiar—and true—to its friendly audiences: those individuals trained in and practicing humanistic education. Still, many colleges and universities connect their university mission statements to the preparation of students for the globalized world, and Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit* is a resounding reminder that this preparation must include the processes taught in humanities education

as well as the most vocational-based skills learning. The book offers compelling examples of the recent struggles and failures in the standardized testing, skills-based models of education, and argues for the potentials of the humanities and arts in educating democratic citizens. Nussbaum thus provides a dynamic rebuttal to questions of what courses in the humanities *give* to students. Her answer includes the processes of critical questioning and logical reasoning, understanding and weighing multiple perspectives, and creatively contemplating a better future.

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