

Higher Education and Democracy: On the Relevance of the *Gen Ed* Curriculum

Committing to Civic Engagement as the Bedrock of Civil Society

SECTION ONE

Statement by Presidents and Chancellors on U.S. Higher Education and Civic Engagement

Folks, to say that today's college students are tomorrow's leaders is not to repeat a tired cliché but to acknowledge a somber fact. Therefore, the purpose of assigning you this material is to provide the context for my passionate view that in a democracy, higher education represents much more than utilitarian preparation for narrow career goals. Toward this end, a *well-designed* Gen Ed curriculum is absolutely apropos. Additionally, universities (administrators *plus* faculty) have an obligation to create a campus climate that encourages *civic engagement*, which is the bedrock of *civil society* and which in turn is the bedrock of democracy.

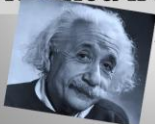
Thirtieth Anniversary Action Statement of Presidents and Chancellors of U.S. Higher Education Institutions (2015/2016)

SOURCE: <https://compact.org/actionstatement/statement/>

In the mid-1980s, a group of higher education leaders came together based on a shared concern about the future of American democracy. Motivated by their conviction that amidst the pressures toward personal acquisition and personal advancement, their students were not learning to think, speak, and act in the service of the public good,

they resolved that higher education must reclaim its historic mission of preparing the next generation of citizens to achieve public goals and solve public problems. This group—a handful at first, and more than one hundred within a year—decided to take action. They became the founders of [Campus Compact](#). Their chosen language—a compact—signified a commitment to each other to work together to advance the public purposes of higher education on their campuses, in their communities, and across the country. It also signified a commitment to honor the longstanding compact between higher education and the public.

“The value of an education in a liberal arts college is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think something that cannot be learned from textbooks.”



---Albert Einstein, 1921

That initial commitment catalyzed a movement that has changed the landscape of higher education. Nearly 1100 institutions now belong to Campus Compact, which has grown to include a network of state and regional Compacts and has become a key element of a global movement for the public purposes of higher education. Campus Compact helped build a national network of engaged faculty and staff and a vast trove of research-based and experiential knowledge about how to educate students for democracy and build community partnerships for positive change. Because of the work undertaken through Campus Compact and

The American Democracy Project

The American Democracy Project for Civic Engagement is a national, multi-campus initiative that seeks to foster informed civic engagement in the United States. The project seeks to create a greater intellectual understanding and commitment to participate in the civic life of the United States.

WEBSITE: <http://www.nytimes.com/college/collegespecial2/>

What is Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

- *Preface, page vi*

A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.

- *Introduction, page xxvi*

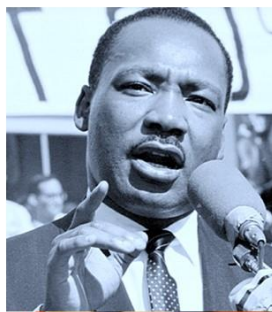
SOURCE: *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000.

a growing group of allies, what was once a novel and marginal idea—that college students should engage in sustained community-based experiences to develop their capacities as local and global citizens—is now in the mainstream of higher education.

In an effort to build from student engagement to deeper institutional change and community impact, Campus Compact in 1999 promulgated the Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, a statement calling for renewed action to magnify the impact of campus engagement. Evidence of the power of the Presidents' Declaration abounds: the emergence of civic engagement centers whose leaders have claimed a voice in higher education; the centrality of community engagement in campus strategic plans; countless innovative partnerships producing positive educational, health, environmental, and economic outcomes for communities; and the creation of the Carnegie Classification

for Community Engagement, the first mechanism for certifying an institution's substantive commitment to engagement.

These successes warrant celebration. They represent advancement of the public ends that are the very reason colleges and universities are brought into existence. Nonetheless, even as colleges and universities have deepened our commitment to the public and democratic ideals at the heart of Campus Compact, the challenges around us have grown. We have seen a decline in the culture and practice of democracy, as evidenced by the



"If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, 'brethren!' Be careful, teachers!...."

"Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction...."

Martin Luther King, Jr.—"The Purpose of Education" from Morehouse College student newspaper, *The Maroon Tiger*, 1947

What is Civil Society?

What is Civil Society?

It is that nebulous public sphere—outside of the arenas of the state, the family, and the corporate marketplace—constituting the lifeblood of a true democracy, where the citizenry *voluntarily* come together for a variety of purposes and in a variety of forms, such as:

- Not-for-profit organizations
- Non-governmental socio-economic/political organizations
- Women's organizations
- Professional associations
- Community groups/organizations
- Block clubs
- Cultural clubs/organizations
- Social/political movements
- Not-for-profit businesses
- Non-governmental sports organizations
- Think-tanks and private research institutes
- Not-for-profit media (cinema, radio, TV, the press, etc.)
- Not-for-profit private educational institutions
- Labor unions
- Protest movements
- Philanthropic organizations
- Business associations
- Student organizations
- Religious institutions.... and so on.



polarization of our political discourse and institutions. And we have witnessed a rapid increase in economic inequality, exacerbating America's persistent racial divide and eroding the capacity of higher education to play its historic role of enabling social mobility.

We therefore face a choice: We can conclude that the challenges are too great and scale back our ambitions for the public and democratic value of higher education, or we can redouble our efforts with a renewed commitment

to preparing students for democratic citizenship, building partnerships for change, and reinvigorating higher education for the public good.

Recognizing the special responsibilities of presidents and chancellors in a democracy, we choose the latter course. We choose to articulate the public purposes of the institutions we lead. We choose to deepen the work of our campuses by ensuring that our teaching, research, and institutional actions contribute to the public good. And we choose to work together to accelerate the pace of change commensurate with the local, national, and global challenges we face. For while we compete for students, for funding, and for victories on the athletic field, when we act in the civic realm we act in concert, speaking with one voice to make the case for the contribution of higher education to the public good.

To advance the public purposes of higher education, we affirm the following statements, which characterize our current commitments and name the ideals toward which we will work with renewed dedication, focus, and vigor.

We empower our students, faculty, staff, and community partners to co-create mutually respectful partnerships in pursuit of a just, equitable, and sustainable future for communities beyond the campus—nearby and around the world.

We prepare our students for lives of engaged citizenship, with the motivation and capacity to deliberate, act, and lead in pursuit of the public good.

We embrace our responsibilities as place based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically.

We harness the capacity of our institutions—through research, teaching,



partnerships, and institutional practice—to challenge the prevailing social and economic inequalities that threaten our democratic future.

We foster an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.

These are commitments we make to each other with a recognition that our goals for a thriving and sustainable democracy cannot be achieved if we act alone—and that they cannot be denied if we act together. Our success over the last thirty years gives us confidence that we can build a world in which all students are prepared for lives of engaged citizenship, all campuses are engaged in strong partnerships advancing community goals, and all of higher education is recognized as an essential building block of a just, equitable, and sustainable future.

In affirming these statements, each of us makes a commitment to develop a Campus Civic Action Plan within one year after March 20, 2016, or the date thereafter on which we become signatories. Our Civic Action Plans will state the actions our campuses will take as we move forward with a renewed sense of urgency, along with the impacts we expect to achieve. Our Civic Action Plans will be shared publicly, as will our assessments of the progress we are making in achieving the goals stated in the Plans.

What is Democracy?

Democracy, in its true sense, has two related halves: the *procedural* and the *authentic* (or substantive). The first half refers to “majority rule” (but qualified by a *bill of rights* that protects minorities) and the accompanying institutional processes of universal suffrage, elections, term-limits, legislative representation, the rule of law, separation of powers, and so on. Authentic democracy refers to equitably securing access for all human beings to the four fundamental needs: food, shelter, health, and security. Therefore, the purpose of procedural democracy is to guarantee authentic democracy. In other words, the former is a means to the latter!

“WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all [Persons] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” —Preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

DON'T VOTE? DON'T COMPLAIN.
I'M JOINING VOTER, AND I APPRECIATE THIS MESSAGE.
REGISTER TO VOTE HERE
YOU CAN EITHER VOTE BY VOTING OR VOTE BY NOT VOTING. IF YOU DON'T VOTE, SOMEONE ELSE'S VOTE COUNTS MORE. IT'S MATH.

“...that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” —President Abraham Lincoln, the Gettysburg Address.

USA: NO WORK, \$150 SHOES
INDONESIA: LOTS OF WORK, NO SHOES

SEGREGATION MUST GO!

WE DESERVE CLEAN WATER

Please Help

SECTION TWO

The Original 1999 Statement

SOURCE: <https://compact.org/resources-for-presidents/presidents-declaration-on-the-civic-responsibility-of-higher-education/>

Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education

As presidents of colleges and universities, both private and public, large and small, two-year and four-year, we challenge higher education to re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal. We also challenge higher education to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities. We have a fundamental task to renew our role as agents of our democracy. This task is both urgent and long-term. There is growing evidence of disengagement of many Americans from the communal life of our society in general, and from the responsibilities of democracy in particular. We share a special concern about the disengagement of college students from democratic participation. A chorus of studies reveals that students are not connected to the larger purposes and aspirations of the American democracy. Voter turnout is low. Feelings that political participation will not make any difference are high. Added to this, there is a profound sense of cynicism and lack of trust in the political process.

We are encouraged that more and more students are volunteering and participating in public and community service, and we have all encouraged them to do so through curricular and co-curricular activity. However, this service is not leading students to embrace the duties of active citizenship and civic participation. We do not blame these college students for their

attitudes toward the democracy; rather, we take responsibility for helping them realize the values and skills of our democratic society and their need to claim ownership of it.

Civilization vs Barbarity

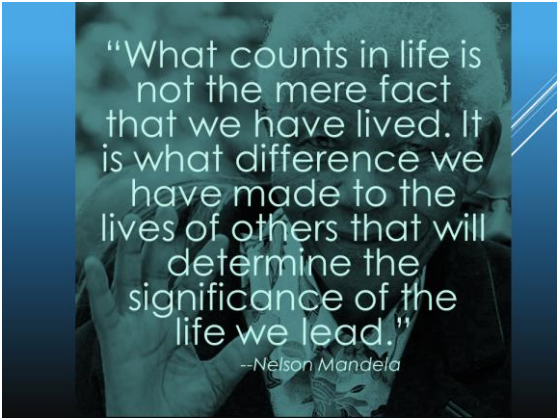


“To glorify war as representing civilization is a folly of the greatest magnitude; nay, war represents nothing less than ultimate barbarity!”

—ygml

This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision-making. We must teach the skills and

values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship.



"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

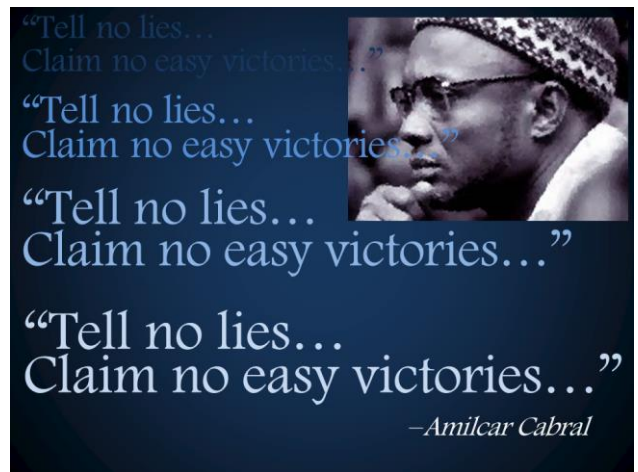
—Nelson Mandela

Colleges and universities have long embraced a mission to educate students for citizenship. But now, with over two-thirds of recent high school graduates and ever-larger numbers of adults enrolling in post-secondary studies, higher education has an unprecedented opportunity to influence the democratic knowledge, dispositions, and habits of the heart that graduates carry with them into the public square.

Higher education is uniquely positioned to help Americans understand the histories and contours of our present challenges as a diverse democracy. It is also uniquely positioned to help both students and our communities to explore new ways of fulfilling the promise of justice and dignity for all, both in our own democracy and as part of the global

community. We know that pluralism is a source of strength and vitality that will enrich our students' education and help them learn both to respect difference and to work together for the common good.

We live in a time when every sector —corporate, government, and nonprofit—is being mobilized to address community needs and reinvigorate our democracy. We cannot be complacent in the face of a country where one out of five children sleeps in poverty and one in six central cities has an unemployment rate 50% or more above the national average, even as our economy shows unprecedented strength. Higher education—its leaders, students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni—remains a key institutional force in our culture that can respond, and can do so without a political agenda and with the intellectual and professional capacities today's challenges so desperately demand. Thus, for society's benefit and for the academy's, we need to do more. Only by demonstrating the democratic principles we espouse can higher education effectively educate our students to be good citizens.



How can we realize this vision of institutional public engagement? It will, of course, take as many forms as there are types of colleges and universities. And it will require our hard work, as a whole and within each of our institutions. We will know we are successful by the robust debate on our campuses, and by the civic behaviors of our students. We will know it by the civic engagement of our faculty. We will know it when our community partnerships improve the quality of community life and the quality of the education we provide.

To achieve these goals, our presidential leadership is essential but, by itself, it is not enough. Faculty, staff, trustees, and students must help craft and act upon our civic missions and responsibilities. We must seek reciprocal partnerships with community leaders, such as those responsible for elementary and secondary education. To achieve our goals we must define them in ways that inspire our institutional missions and help measure our success. We ask other college presidents to join us in seeking recognition of civic responsibility in accreditation procedures, Carnegie classifications, and national rankings, and to work with governors, state legislators, and state higher education offices on state expectations for civic engagement in public systems.

We believe that the challenge of the next millennium is the renewal of our own democratic life and reassertion of social stewardship. In celebrating the birth of our democracy, we can think of no nobler task than committing ourselves to helping catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the


public purposes and civic mission of higher education. We believe that now and through the next century, our institutions must be vital agents and architects of a flourishing democracy. We urge all of higher education to join us.

NOTE:

The Presidents' Declaration was drafted in 1999 by Thomas Ehrlich, senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and president emeritus of Indiana University, and Elizabeth Hollander, then executive director of Campus Compact, with input from a distinguished Presidents' Leadership Colloquium Committee composed of Derek Bok, president emeritus of Harvard University; Dolores Cross, president of Morris Brown College; John DiBiaggio, president of Tufts University; Claire Gaudiani, president of Connecticut College; Stanley Ikenberry, president of the American Council on Education; Donald Kennedy, president emeritus of Stanford University; Charles Knapp, past president of the Aspen Institute; Edward A. Malloy, president of the University of Notre Dame; Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the

The Ignorantsia vs the Intelligentsia

“The educated back up their views on major issues of the day with research, while the uneducated back up theirs with ignorance!”



—ygm1

States; and Eduardo Padrón, president of Miami-Dade College.

We are deeply indebted to the drafters of the Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University crafted by Harry Boyte of the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota and Elizabeth Hollander, with the commentary of a distinguished group of scholars, administrators, and others. Many ideas and some of the language have been used here, with the authors' permission.

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