

Too often civic learning and democratic engagement efforts can be categorized as celebratory, episodic, marginal and scripted.

## The best civic learning and democratic engagement efforts are likely to be:

**Integral:** Woven into the fabric of the institution and reflected in all of its activities, including research, teaching and learning in every discipline and across disciplines; student affairs programs and services; and campus cultural practices.

**Relational:** Involving opportunities to build authentic connections across difference, and not just complete tasks or study people and problems from a distance.

**Organic:** Involving unscripted opportunities to imagine, create, and grow together with partners in public work, and to choose or forge new paths.

**Generative:** Directed at continually improving conditions and relationships, and so opening up even more powerful possibilities for collective action.

Hoffman, D. (2015). *Describing Transformative Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Practices*. AACU's American Democracy Project blog.

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The CLDE emergent theory of change builds on threads of the 2012 *A Crucible Moment* report's figure asking What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?. Both the report and the theory in its current form argue that higher education must cultivate campus environments (civic ethos) as well as individual and collective capacities (civic literacy & skill building; civic inquiry, civic action, and civic agency) to advance civic learning and democratic engagement:

Language in italics denotes additions/changes to *A Crucible Moment*'s Figure 4: What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?

### ***Cultivating Campus Environments:***

#### **Civic Ethos of campus:**

The infusion of democratic values into the customs and habits of everyday practices, structures, and interactions; the defining character of the institution and those in it that emphasizes open-mindedness, civility, the worth of each person, ethical behaviors, and concern for the well-being of others; a spirit of public-mindedness that influences the goals of the institution and its engagement with local and global communities.

### ***Cultivating Collective (and Individual) Capacities:***

#### **Civic Literacy & Skill Building** as a goal for every student:

The cultivation of foundational knowledge about fundamental principles and debates about democracy expressed over time, both within the United States and in other countries; familiarity with several key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements undertaken to achieve the full promise of democracy; the ability to think critically about complex issues and to seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences.

#### **Civic Inquiry** integrated within the majors and general education:

The practice of inquiring about the civic dimensions and public consequences of a subject of study; the exploration of the impact of choices on different constituencies and entities, including the planet; the deliberate consideration of differing points of views; the ability to describe and analyze civic intellectual debates within one's major or areas of study.

#### **Civic Action** as lifelong practice:

The capacity and commitment both to participate constructively with diverse others and to work collectively to address common problems; the practice of working in a pluralistic society and world to improve the quality of people's lives and the sustainability of the planet; the ability to analyze systems in order to plan and engage in public action; the moral and political courage to take risks to achieve a greater public good.

#### **Civic Agency**

*Involves the capacities of citizens to work collaboratively across differences like partisan ideology, faith traditions, income, geography, race, and ethnicity to address common challenges, solve problems and create common ground; requires a set of individual skills, knowledge, and predispositions; also involves questions of institutional design, particularly how to constitute groups and institutions for sustainable collective action.*

The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. 2012. *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities. (Fig. 4: What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?, p. 15)

# Four Questions

## for the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Movement

### 1. The Vision Question

What are the key features of the thriving democracy we aspire to enact and support through our work?

**Premise:** We haven't experienced a truly thriving democracy yet.

**Provisional answers:**

"[Democracy] must be enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions" (Dewey).

One key feature is "full participation," which involves creating "institutions that enable people, whatever their identity, background, or institutional position, to thrive, realize their capabilities, engage meaningfully in institutional life, and contribute to the flourishing of others." (Stumm, Eatman, Saltmarsh & Bush).

### 3. The Pedagogy Question

How can we best foster the acquisition and development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a thriving democracy?

**Premise:** The environments in which we foster these qualities must reflect our intended learning outcomes. At present, they often do not.

**Provisional answer:**

The learning process should be

- Relational
- Integral
- Organic
- Generative

### 2. The Learning Outcomes Question

What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do people need in order to help create and contribute to a thriving democracy?

**Premise:** These learning outcomes include both individual and collective capacities. In part because we have not achieved clarity in our answer to the first question, it is likely that we have devoted insufficient attention to some important knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

**Provisional answers:**

- Civic Literacy
- Civic Agency
- Civic Inquiry
- Civic Action

### 4. The Strategy Question

How can we build the institutional culture, infrastructure, and relationships needed to support learning that enables a thriving democracy?

**Premise:** People and institutions do not change easily. Changes in everyday practices and relationships can be the hardest to achieve.

**Provisional answer:**

Success will involve very thoughtful, patient, inclusive organizing, at both the institutional and national levels.

**Additional consideration:**

The necessary relationships will transcend the usual categories and boundaries (e.g., involving people both inside and outside the institution, crossing roles, etc.).