



## DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT WHITE PAPER

By John Saltmarsh, Matt Hartley, and Patti Clayton

*"...whether this educative process is carried on in a predominantly democratic or non-democratic way becomes therefore a question of transcendent importance not only for education itself but for its final effect upon all the interests and activities of a society that is committed to the democratic way of life."*

*John Dewey, 1937.*

### Background and Context

Participants at a recent Wingspread conference on civic engagement in higher education (Brukardt et al. 2004)<sup>1</sup> concluded that while the movement has created some change, it has also plateaued and requires a more comprehensive effort to ensure lasting commitment and institutional capacity. For the participants at Wingspread, and for others involved in civic engagement in higher education, the time has come for "calling the question" of whether engagement will be viewed as a core value of the university of the 21st century – as centrally important to the civic mission of higher education and to generating and transmitting new knowledge (Bjarnason, S. and P. Coldstream, eds., 2003, p. 323)<sup>2</sup>. The concern is that "engagement has not become the defining characteristic of higher education's mission nor has it been embraced across disciplines, departments and institutions" (ii) and "that the momentum needed for engagement to become fully identified with the mission of higher education" (4) is waning. As the participants concluded, despite widespread evidence of innovative engagement activities across higher education, "few institutions have made the significant, sustainable, structural reforms that will result in an academic culture that values community engagement as a core function of the institution" (5).

Will higher education live up to its democratic purpose and undertake the kind of deep change in institutional culture needed to create the conditions for sustained civic engagement? As Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett argue in *Dewey's Dream*,

---

<sup>1</sup> Brukardt, M.J., Holland, B., Percy, S., Zimpher, N. (2004) *Calling the question: Is higher education ready to commit to community engagement*. A Wingspread statement, available at <http://www.uwm.edu/Milwaukeeidea/elements/wingspread.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Bjarnason, S. and P. Coldstream, eds., 2003. *The Idea of Engagement: Universities in Society*, London: Association of Commonwealth Universities.

for universities and colleges to fulfill their great potential and really contribute to a democratic...revolution, they will have to do things very differently than they do now...To become part of the solution, higher eds must give full-hearted, full-minded devotion to the painfully difficult task of transforming themselves into socially responsible civic universities and colleges. To do so, they will have to radically change their institutional cultures and structures, democratically realign and integrate themselves, and develop a comprehensive, realistic strategy. (84)<sup>3</sup>

The sense of drift and stalled momentum in civic engagement work raises a number of important questions: Are current civic engagement efforts transforming higher education or have they been adopted in ways that do not fundamentally challenge the dominant cultures of higher education institutions and American society? How can the movement best navigate the inherent tension between challenging the status quo and securing legitimacy through accommodation? How can colleges and universities cultivate caring and creative democratic citizens and advance democracy in schools, universities, communities, and society? What sort of institutional commitments are needed to foster civic engagement among students and among academics in order to advance participatory democracy on campus, in the community, and the wider society?

On February 26-27, 2008, a colloquium of 33 academic leaders came together at the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio, for the purpose of critically examining the state of civic engagement in higher education. The primary goal of the meeting was to provide a forum in which a group of leaders in civic engagement and higher education could identify problems and issues associated with reforming higher education for community engagement and democratic citizenship. Dovetailing with this objective, another goal was to determine how best to strategically promote democratic citizenship as a key institutional priority for American colleges and universities. Organized by the Kettering Foundation and the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE), the meeting was orientated specifically around the democratic purposes of higher education, consistent with the belief that, as Frank Newman wrote in 1985, "the most critical demand is to restore to higher education its original purpose of preparing graduates for a life of involved and committed citizenship."

Dialogue at the colloquium was guided in part through discussion of the 2007 book by Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*, as well as publications by the Kettering Foundation, including *Agent of Democracy: Higher Education and the HEX Journey and Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education* (2008). *Dewey's Dream* acted as an inspirational catalyst for the meeting, with university-assisted community schools serving as a model for *democratic civic engagement*. What Dewey and university-assisted community schools emphasize is the meaning of democracy within an educational setting – not that it is merely the university's aspirational role to prepare students for civic responsibility after they

---

<sup>3</sup> Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett. 2007. *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

graduate, but that through their educational experience students experiment with and practice democracy through their community-based educational experiences. The common thread running through the resources shared at the meeting is the importance of answering the question, "Higher education for what?" The premise of these books is that higher education in America has a fundamental democratic purpose – both educating for democracy and creating educational institutions that foster the revitalization of democratic society. This understanding of and commitment to the core democratic purpose of higher education framed the meeting dialogue.

A central framing question guided the Kettering colloquium: <sup>①</sup> *Why has the civic engagement movement in higher education stalled and <sup>②</sup> what are the strategies needed to further advance institutional transformation aimed at generating democratic, community-based knowledge and action?* The resulting conversation yielded an array of perspectives on the nature of the movement, the impetus for advancing a civic agenda in higher education, and how and in what domains (and even to what extent) change is required. Although there were many important insights shared at the meeting, here we focus on a few themes which appeared to attract broad consensus.

### Findings

Two ideas met with near-universal agreement. The first is that this nation faces significant societal challenges, and higher education must play a role in responding to them. Since the time of our meeting, a number of national polls have shown that the vast majority of Americans feel the country is headed in the wrong direction. The evidence is readily seen in the persistent poverty of our inner cities ("rediscovered" by many in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina), in the widening divide between the rich and poor, in our failure to have a meaningful dialogue about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and (more recently) in the headlines about our fragile economy. There was widespread agreement that colleges and universities have civic and public purposes, including the preparation of an enlightened and productive citizenry and engaging in scholarship that both addresses pressing problems and holds a mirror to society to allow for self-reflection and self-correction. The question is how to achieve these aims. A second point of agreement is that the civic engagement movement has not realized its full potential. While we characterized it as "stalled" in our initial framing statement, others see it as challenged by unclear goals, fragmented efforts, or a predominant ideology in the academy that acts contrary to overtly civic aims. Whatever the case, there is important work to be done to deepen existing work and to draw others to this important cause. Simply put, civic engagement is a defining characteristic of few colleges and universities. Colloquium participants pointed to several contributing factors. Indeed, there were a number of themes that emerged from our discussion which we offer here as (necessarily contestable) propositions.

**1. Higher education's perceived obligation to develop civic agency is not high on the public's agenda.**

The ideals of promoting democracy are not the most pressing concerns of many people across the country who are dealing with often harsh realities. This is reflected in student attitudes. As trend data from UCLA's survey of incoming freshman has shown, over the past two decades students have come to see higher education primarily as a ticket to a good job. Their interest in the more formative aspects of education (e.g. "developing a meaningful philosophy of life," one of the ideals of liberal education) have dramatically declined. As Caryn Musil notes, findings from focus groups conducted by the AAC&U show that civic engagement remains a very low priority for many students.

**2. Our inadequate conception of what effective democratic education might look like is reflected in the imprecise and even conflicting language by members of the movement.**

Currently, a wide variety of terms are used when discussing the public purpose of higher education—e.g., community engagement, civic engagement, engagement, democratic education, education for democracy, and so forth. This disparate language reflects substantive divisions within the broader movement. For example (and perhaps put a bit simplistically), there are faculty members who embrace service-learning as a superior means of conveying disciplinary knowledge, while others see it as a transformational pedagogy. This lack of clarity has the very real advantage of enabling a broad range of people to feel they are part of the movement. Vague language, however, also runs the risk of portraying a movement that stands for anything and therefore nothing. Can we find language that has wide "traction" but also inspires?

**3. The movement is highly fragmented and compartmentalized.**

Perhaps because there is no unifying vision, the "movement," such as it is, consists of many regional and national initiatives aimed at promoting a wide variety of activities (e.g., service-learning, university/community partnerships, democratic deliberation, diversity initiatives) to various audiences. Some efforts are wholly disconnected from others. For example, we rarely see instances where democratic deliberation efforts help inform potential partnerships that then lead to rich service-learning opportunities. As AAC&U has pointed out, diversity efforts have too often remained divorced from civic engagement efforts. But it is not clear what efforts might profitably be advanced to address this fragmentation. Attempts to create umbrella networks (a network of networks as one calls itself) have met with negligible success.

**4. The movement has largely sidestepped the political dimension of civic engagement.**

With only a few exceptions (the AASCU's American Democracy Project is a good example), institutional (and national) efforts do not explicitly link the work of engagement to our democracy. What has emerged is a remarkably apolitical "civic" engagement. As one participant put it, "We need a movement that puts the question of the democratic purpose of higher education on the table." There are pressures in certain sectors (e.g., some public institutions) against doing anything that is seen as "political"—partisan activities and political awareness and agency are being confounded. A few individuals raised questions about the extent to which colleges and universities could meaningfully play such a role: Can our institutions of higher learning fulfill their various purposes (job preparation, economic development, knowledge creation, cultural resource provision) and also act to promote a strong democracy?

**5. The dominant epistemology of the academy runs counter to the civic engagement agenda.**

The academy has established legitimacy within society in part through its widely-recognized ability to convey expertise. Specialization has produced a great deal of new knowledge. But it has also produced a technocracy that places certain kinds of expertise above all others. As one participant put it, "We see no other warrant for our existence than the expert model." Excessive homage to a narrow disciplinary guild and the presumption of neutrality has robbed the academy of its ability to effectively challenge society and to seek change. How might a democratic epistemology be articulated? What kinds of knowledge and scholarly practices would it value and seek to support?

### Discussion

Civic engagement is a term commonly used in higher education. In a 2002 report, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) noted that while engagement has become "shorthand for describing a new era of two-way partnerships between America's colleges and universities and the publics they serve . . . it also presents the risk that the term can say everything and nothing at the same time. . . . [T]he lack of clear definition can leave some campuses and their leaders with the impression that they are 'doing engagement,' when in fact they are not" (8). Civic engagement is often used as an umbrella term, connoting any campus-based activities that connects with or relates to something – issues, problems, organizations, schools, governments – outside the campus. It has a certain idealistic appeal as it relates to institutional mission – preparing socially responsible citizens as graduates – and refers to the accountability of the college or university to the wider society and public interest.

In its "big tent" framing, civic engagement is defined largely by the characteristics of activity and place – that is, some kind of activity (a course, a research project, internships, field work, clinical placement, economic development, volunteerism) that occurs in the "community" (local, national, global). The focus on place often leads to the work of engagement being labeled "community engagement," or activity that occurs in a certain place – the "community." Campuses that approach civic engagement as a new activity or new set of activities connecting to community often do so in ways that create new programs, offices, centers, courses, or service opportunities. These additional activities are adaptive to the existing cultures of higher education and do not call for changes in ways colleges and universities fundamentally operate – in underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products. Engagement defined by activities connected to places outside the campus does not focus attention on the processes involved in the activity – how it is done – or the purpose of connecting with places outside the campus – why it is done. A focus on the processes and purposes of engagement redefines the meaning of civic engagement and raises issues of fundamental change in core operations and functions of the campus. As Boyer noted, "What is needed is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction."<sup>4</sup>

Boyer

To paraphrase Dewey, mere activity in a community does not constitute civic engagement. Civic engagement defined by processes and purpose has a particular meaning in higher education and is associated with implications for institutional change. The processes of engagement refer to the way in which those on campus – administrators, academics, staff, and students – relate to those outside the campus. Purpose refers specifically to enhancing a public culture of democracy on and off campus and alleviating public problems through democratic means. Processes and purpose are inextricably linked; the means must be consistent with the ends and the ends are defined by democratic culture. The norms of democratic culture are determined by the values of inclusiveness, participation, task sharing, lay participation, reciprocity in public problem solving, and an equality of respect for the knowledge and experience that everyone contributes to education and community building. Democratic processes and purposes reorient civic engagement to what we are calling "democratic engagement" – engagement that has significant implications for transforming higher education such that democratic values are part of the leadership of administrators, the scholarly work of faculty, the educational work of staff, and the leadership development and learning outcomes of students. It has epistemological, curricular, pedagogical, research, policy, and culture implications. It adheres to the shared understanding that the only way to learn the norms and develop the values of democracy is to practice democracy as part of one's education.

Without a democratic purpose, engagement efforts are often pursued as ends in themselves, and engagement becomes reduced to a public relations function of making known what the campus is doing for the community and providing opportunities for students to have experiences in the community. Engagement in this sense reflects the dominant academic culture of higher education, often characterized as "scientific,"

<sup>4</sup> Boyer, E. L. (1994, March 9). Creating the new American college. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A48.

“rationalized,” objectified,” or “technocratic,” meaning that the approach to public problems is predominantly shaped by specialized expertise “applied” externally “to” or “on” the community, providing “solutions” to what has been determined to be the community’s “needs.”

The distinction we are making between civic engagement as it is widely manifested in higher education and what we are calling democratic engagement is not attributed to the kind of knowledge and expertise generated in the academy, but whether that knowledge and its use is inclusive of other sources of knowledge and problem solving. The measure of the democratic processes and purpose of engagement is demonstrated by a capacity to learn in the company of others and not to rely solely on the expertise of the academy. As Levine has observed, “technical expertise has evident value. No one can doubt that we are better off because of the specialized knowledge possessed by physicians, engineers, economists, and others. Expertise is such a fundamental organizing principle that we often overlook its drawbacks and limitations – especially for democracy.”<sup>5</sup> Democratic engagement is not dismissive of expert knowledge – on the contrary, it is expertise in solving social problems that is sought by communities – but is critical of expertise that claims an exclusionary position relative to other forms of knowledge and other knowledge producers. Attention to process raises the question of how expertise is positioned and exercised. Attention to purpose defines the ways in which expertise can be exercised democratically.

The distinction that we are making between civic engagement as it is predominantly practiced in higher education and democratic engagement as an alternative framework is intended to assist academic leaders and practitioners in the design and implementation of engagement efforts on campus. We also want to acknowledge that our purpose here is to conceptually compare the two frameworks, recognizing that civic engagement on many campuses has elements of each of these frameworks, in some cases due to efforts to shift to a more democratic framing of engagement.

### ***Civic Engagement Framed by Activity and Place***

The dominant framework of engagement in higher education is grounded in an institutional epistemology that privileges the expertise in the university and applies it externally, through activities in the community. “This epistemology,” William Sullivan has noted, “is firmly entrenched as the operating system of much of the American university.”<sup>6</sup> There exists, Sullivan writes, an “affinity of positivist understandings of research for ‘applying’ knowledge to the social world on the model of the way engineers ‘apply’ expert understanding to the problems of structures.” Knowledge produced by credentialed, detached experts is embedded in hierarchies of knowledge generation and knowledge use, creating a division between knowledge producers (in the university) and knowledge

---

<sup>5</sup> Peter Levine, 2007. *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> William M. Sullivan, 2000. “Institutional Identity and Social Responsibility in Higher Education,” in Thomas Ehrlich, ed., *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, p. 29.

consumers (in the community). In the positivist scheme, “researchers ‘produce’ knowledge, which is then ‘applied’ to problems and problematic populations.” Academic expertise focuses “on building theory, being ‘objective,’ writing mainly for each other in a language of their own creation, building professional associations, and staying away from political controversies.”<sup>7</sup> Academic knowledge is valued more than community-based knowledge, and knowledge flows in one direction, from inside the boundaries of the university outward to its place of need and application in the community.

This framework of engagement locates the university as the center of solutions to public problems and educates students through service as proto-experts who will be able to perform civic tasks in and on communities that they work with because they will have the knowledge and credentials to know what to do to help communities improve. In this framework, students, in their developing citizen roles, will not be taught the political dimensions of their activities because questions of power are left out of the context of objectified knowledge production and in the way that “service” is provided to communities. Civic engagement activities as an end in themselves perpetuate a kind of politics that rejects popularly informed decision-making in favor of expert-informed knowledge application. Politics is something to be kept separate from the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge because it is understood in terms of competing partisan positions and opposing ideologies and is thus not only avoided by academics who perceive such work as advocacy but is prohibited by federal mandate when community service programs are funded through federal agencies. Consequently, on many campuses, remarkably apolitical “civic” engagement efforts have emerged.<sup>8</sup>

The dominant form of civic engagement that has emerged in higher education reflects interactions between those in colleges and universities with external entities in the community that are defined by partnerships (formal and informal relationships) and mutuality (each party in the relationship benefits from its involvement). Partnerships and mutuality allow the university to better meet its academic mission by improving teaching and learning and through community service and applied research opportunities. Communities benefit from the involvement of the university as students and faculty help in meeting unmet community needs. Engagement is enacted *for* the public, and because it entails the

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Expert-driven, hierarchical knowledge generation and dissemination is not only an epistemological position but, as Harry Boyte, a participant at the meeting, insightfully points out, a political one. Traditional academic epistemology, with its embedded values, methods, and practices, signifies a “pattern of power” in relationships, creating a “technocracy” and a particular politics that is “the core obstacle to higher education’s engagement.” Not only is the power and politics of expert academic knowledge what he calls “the largest obstacle in higher education to authentic engagement with communities,” it is also “a significant contributor to the general crisis of democracy.” Its core negative functions,” he explains, “are to undermine the standing and to delegitimize the knowledge of those without credentials, degrees, and university training...It conceives of people without credentials as needy clients to be rescued or as customers to be manipulated.” In this way of thinking and acting, he notes, genuine reciprocal learning is not possible. See Boyte, H. (2007) A New Civic Politics: Review by Harry C. Boyte of Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett. *Dewey’s Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform. Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, Vol. 12, Issue 1.

provision of a social service, it is understood by academics as “civic” in its aims and outcomes.

### ***Civic Engagement Framed by Processes and Purpose***

A democratic framework shaped by attention to processes and purpose is “based on both sides bringing their own experience and expertise to the project,” noted Lynton, and “this kind of collaboration requires a substantial change in the prevalent culture of academic institutions.”<sup>9</sup> It challenges leaders and practitioners of civic engagement on college and university campuses to reframe community-based teaching, scholarship, and service so that, as Greenwood explains, “the terms of engagement, the ways of studying the issues and the ownership of the actions and the intellectual products are...negotiated with the legitimate local stakeholders.”<sup>10</sup> Collaborative knowledge construction that brings together academic knowledge with the local knowledge of community stakeholders in defining the problem to be addressed, a shared understanding of the problem, and designing, implementing and evaluating the actions taken to address the problem, is what Greenwood calls “a democratizing form of content-specific knowledge creation, theorization, analysis, and action design in which the goals are democratically set, learning capacity is shared, and success is collaboratively evaluated.”<sup>11</sup>

Community partnerships in a democratic-centered framework of engagement have an explicit and intentional democratic dimension framed as inclusive, collaborative, and problem-oriented work in which academics share knowledge generating tasks with the public and involve community partners as participants in public problem-solving. As O’Meara and Rice point out, “the expert model...often gets in the way of constructive university-community collaboration” because it does not “move beyond ‘outreach,’” or “go beyond ‘service,’ with its overtones of noblesse oblige.” A shift in discourse from “partnerships” and “mutuality” to that of “reciprocity” is grounded in explicitly democratic values of sharing previously academic tasks with non-academics and encouraging the participation of non-academics in ways that enhance and enable broader engagement and deliberation about major social issues inside and outside the university. Democratic engagement seeks the public good *with* the public and not merely *for* the public as a means to facilitating a more active and engaged democracy.<sup>12</sup> Reciprocity signals an

---

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Lynton, 1995. “Forward: What is a Metropolitan University?” in Johnson, D.M and Bell, D.A. Eds. *Metropolitan Universities: An Emerging Model in American Higher Education*. University of North Texas Press, Denton, TX., p. xii. See also, Lynton, E. A.(1994) Knowledge and Scholarship. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum*, v. 5, n. 1, p. 9-17.

<sup>10</sup> Davydd J. Greenwood, 2008. “Theoretical research, applied research, and action research: The deinstitutionalization of activist research,” in C. R. Hale, ed., *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 319-340p. 333.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>12</sup> There is a growing body of literature that addresses the democratic dimensions of civic engagement in higher education that includes the work of Harry Boyte, William Sullivan, Alber Dzur, Michael Edwards, David Mathews, Ira Harkavy, Scott Peters, Donald Schon, Ernest Lynton, Ernest Boyer, Michael Gibbons, Mary Walshok, Eugene Rice, among others. See in particular: Benson, L., I. Harkavy, and M. Hartley. 2005. Integrating a commitment to the public good into the institutional fabric. In *Higher education for the public good: Emerging voices from a national movement*, ed. A. J. Kezar, A. C. Chambers, and J. C. Burkhardt. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Boyer, E. (1990) *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professorate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; Boyer, E. (1996) “The Scholarship of Engagement,” *Journal of Public Service & Outreach*, 1, no. 1, spring. P. 11-20; Boyte, H. (2007) *A New Civic Politics: Review*

epistemological shift that values not only expert knowledge that is rational, analytic and positivist but also values a different kind of rationality that is more relational, localized, and contextual and favors mutual deference between lay persons and academics. Knowledge generation is a process of co-creation, breaking down the distinctions between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers.

It further implies scholarly work that is conducted with shared authority and power with those in the community in all aspects of the relationship, from defining problems, choosing approaches, addressing issues, developing the final products, and participating in assessment. "The design of problem-solving actions through collaborative knowledge construction with the legitimate stakeholders in the problem," writes Greenwood, takes place in

collaborative arenas for knowledge development in which the professional researcher's knowledge is combined with the local knowledge of the stakeholders in defining the problem to be addressed. Together, they design and implement the actions to be taken on the basis of their shared understanding of the problem. Together, the parties develop plans of action to improve the situation together, and they evaluate the adequacy of what was done.<sup>13</sup>

Reciprocity operates to facilitate the involvement of individuals in the community not just as consumers of knowledge and services but as participants in the larger public culture of democracy.

Democratic engagement locates the university within an ecosystem of knowledge production. In this ecosystem, the university interacts with outside knowledge producers in order to create new problem-solving knowledge through a multi-directional flow of knowledge and expertise. In this paradigm, students learn cooperative and creative problem-solving within learning environments in which faculty, students, and individuals

---

by Harry C. Boyte of Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett. *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, Volume 12, Issue 1; Boyte H. (2008) Against the Current: Developing the Civic Agency of Students, *Change*, May/June; Dzur, A.W. (2008) *Democratic professionalism: Citizen participation and the reconstruction of professional ethics, identity, and practice*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press; Edwards, M. (2006) Looking back from 2046: Thoughts on the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institute for Revolutionary Social Science. Keynote Address, 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Institute for Development Studies University of Sussex, UK ([www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)); Greenwood, D. J. (2008) Theoretical research, applied research, and action research: The deinstitutionalization of activist research, in C. R. Hale, ed., *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 319-340; Lynton, E. A. (1994) Knowledge and Scholarship. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum*, v. 5, n. 1, p. 9-17, Summer; Gibbons, M. et al., (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, London: Sage; Schon, D. 1995. "The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology," *Change*. Nov./Dec., Vol. 27, No. 6, p. 26, 9p; Sullivan, W. M. (2000) Institutional Identity and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, in *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*. Ed. Thomas Ehrlich. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press; p. 19-36; Van De Ven, A. 2008. *Engaged Scholarship: A guide for Organizational and Social Research*, New York: Orford University Press; Walshok, M. 1995. *Knowledge without Boundaries: What America's Research Universities Can Do for the Economy, the Workplace, and the Community*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>13</sup> Greenwood, p. 327.

from the community work and deliberate together. Politics is understood through explicit awareness and experiencing of patterns of power that are present in the relationship between the university and the community. Thus, politics is not reduced to partisanship and advocacy. In the collaborative process, academics are not partisan political activists but, as described by Albert Dzur, “have sown the seeds of a more deliberative democracy” in universities and communities “by cultivating norms of equality, collaboration, reflection, and communication.”<sup>14</sup> Civic engagement in the democratic-centered paradigm is intentionally political in that students learn about democracy by acting democratically.

### Comparing Civic Engagement Frameworks

	Civic Engagement (Focus on Activity and Place)	Democratic Civic Engagement (Focus on Purpose and Process)
Community Relationships	Partnerships and mutuality	Reciprocity
	Deficit-based understanding of community	Asset-based understanding of community
	Academic work done <i>for</i> the public	Academic work done <i>with</i> the public
Knowledge production/research	Applied	Inclusive, collaborative, problem-oriented
	Unidirectional flow of knowledge	Multi-directional flow of knowledge
Epistemology	Positivist/scientific/technocratic	Relational, localized, contextual
	Distinction between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers	Co-creation of knowledge
	Primacy of academic knowledge	Shared authority for knowledge creation
	University as the center of public problem-solving	University as a part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem-solving
Political Dimension	Apolitical engagement	Facilitating an inclusive, collaborative, and deliberative democracy
Outcome	Knowledge generation and dissemination through community involvement	Community change that results from the co-creation of knowledge

Civic engagement without reciprocity (processes) and its democratic dimensions (purpose) is not the same thing as democratic civic engagement. Civic engagement shaped by activity and place devoid of attention to processes and purpose represents what Greenwood calls “a tendency for...engagement to become simultaneously fashionable and disengaged.”<sup>15</sup> Civic engagement without an intentional and explicit democratic dimension keeps academics and universities disengaged from participating in the public culture of democracy. Further, it does not compel the same kind of change in institutional culture that democratic civic engagement requires.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Dzur, 2008. *Democratic Professionalism: Citizen Participation and the Reconstruction of Professional Ethics, Identity, and Practice*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Greenwood, p. 332.

### ***Institutional Change for Democratic Engagement***

Civic engagement shaped by activities and place requires change in practices and structures, and is associated with what Larry Cuban has described as “first order change,” which aims to improve “the efficiency and effectiveness of what is done... to make what already exists more efficient and more effective, without disturbing the basic organizational features, without substantially altering the ways in which [faculty and students] perform their roles. Those who propose first-order changes believe that the existing goals and structures...are both adequate and desirable.”<sup>16</sup> The dominant framework of civic engagement need not fundamentally alter the established organizational structures and culture of higher education. It does not require what Eckel, Hill, and Green (1998) refer to as changes that “alter the culture of the institution,” those which require “major shifts in an institution’s culture—the common set of beliefs and values that creates a shared interpretation and understanding of events and actions.”<sup>17</sup> The dominant framework of civic engagement does not compel change which transforms institutional culture. The pervasiveness of civic engagement, from this perspective, does not appear to have slowed down or stalled in any way. There is a proliferation of engagement activities and innovative community-based practice throughout the university and across higher education. Civic engagement appears to be flourishing.<sup>18</sup>

of structure

Civic engagement shaped by processes and purpose, with its explicit democratic value of reciprocity, points to change in the institutional culture of colleges and universities, or what Cuban identifies as “second-order changes,” which “seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together. These changes reflect major dissatisfaction with present arrangements. Second-order changes introduce new goals, structures, and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems.”<sup>19</sup> Second-order changes are associated with transformational change, which Eckel, Hill, and Green define as change that “ (1) alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; (2) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (3) is intentional; and (4) occurs over time.” Cultural change focuses on “institution-wide patterns of perceiving, thinking, and feeling; shared understandings; collective assumptions; and common interpretive frameworks are the ingredients of this ‘invisible glue’ called institutional culture.”<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, the civic engagement movement seems to have hit a wall: innovative practices that shift epistemology, reshape the

<sup>16</sup> Larry Cuban, 1988. “A fundamental puzzle of school reform.” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(5), p. 341-342.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Eckel, Barbara Hill, and Madeline Green 1998. *On change: En route to transformation.* Washington, D.C., American Council on Education, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> The literature on institutional change in higher education is considerable and growing. Our analysis of institutional culture, institutional transformation, and institutionalization draw heavily on the following sources: Cuban, L. (1988). “A fundamental puzzle of school reform.” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(5): 341-344; Eckel, P., Hill, B., and Green, M. (1998). *On change: En route to transformation.* Washington, D.C., American Council on Education; Kuh, G. D., and Whitt, E. J. (1988). *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities.* ASHE-EPIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, D.C., Association for the Study of Higher Education; and Tierney, W. G. (1988). “Organizational culture in higher education: Defining the essential.” *Journal of Higher Education*, 59(1): 2-21.

<sup>19</sup> Cuban, p. 342.

<sup>20</sup> Eckel, Hill, and Green, p. 3.

curriculum, alter pedagogy, and redefine scholarship are not being supported through academic norms and institutional reward policies that shape the academic cultures of the academy. There are limits to the degree of change that occurs institutionally, and the civic engagement work appears to have been accommodated to the dominant expert-centered framework. Democratic engagement is not embedded in the institutional culture, remains marginalized activity, and its sustainability is questionable.

***Transformation through change in institutional culture.***

First-Order Change	Second-Order Change
Aim is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is done - to make what already exists more efficient and more effective.	Aim is to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together. These changes reflect major dissatisfaction with present arrangements.
Does not disturb the basic organizational features, or substantially alter the ways in which faculty and students perform their roles. Those who propose first-order changes believe that the existing goals and structure are both adequate and desirable.	Second-order changes introduce new goals, structures, and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems.
Does not require changes that alter the culture of the institution, those which require major shifts in an institution's culture—the common set of beliefs and values that creates a shared interpretation and understanding of events and actions.	Is associated with transformational change, defined as change that (1) alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; (2) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (3) is intentional; and (4) occurs over time.
	Focuses on institution-wide patterns of perceiving, thinking, and feeling; shared understandings; collective assumptions; and common interpretive frameworks are the ingredients of this 'invisible glue' called institutional culture.

Adapted from Cuban, L. (1988). "A fundamental puzzle of school reform." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 69(5): 341-344, Eckel, P., Hill, B., and Green, M. (1998). *On change: En route to transformation*. Washington, D.C., American Council on Education, and Kuh, G. D., and Whitt, E. J. (1988). *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities*. ASHE-EPIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, D.C., Association for the Study of Higher Education.

The civic engagement movement in higher education may be entering a new period of development. It is still a relatively recent phenomenon in higher education that emerged, somewhat ironically, over the same period of time that higher education lost its image as a social institution fostering the public good and instead is widely perceived as a market-driven institution existing for the private economic benefit and upward mobility of individuals – what Sullivan calls “the default program of instrumental individualism.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the turmoil within the movement represents the stirrings of an important debate about the relationship between academic institutions and the public. While the dominant form of civic engagement that has emerged in higher education is largely devoid of both long-term democracy-building values and higher education’s contribution to the public culture of democracy, an alternative framework is possible and can contribute to the re-shaping of higher education to better meet its academic and civic missions in the 21<sup>st</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Sullivan, p. 20.

century. As Sullivan reminds us, “campuses educate their students for citizenship most effectively to the degree that they become sites for constructive exchange and cooperation among diverse groups of citizens from the larger community.”<sup>22</sup> It is this democratic framework of civic engagement that holds the promise of transforming not only the educational practice and institutional identity of colleges and universities but our public culture as well.

While we alone are accountable for the interpretations and analysis offered here, the basis for our understanding of the civic engagement work in higher education is a result of the invaluable contributions of the participants at the meeting that took place at the Kettering Foundation, February 26-27, 2008. We want to thank each of the participants for their insights and wisdom and for their commitment to the democratic purposes of higher education. We think we can legitimately speak for all of the participants to say that it is our desire that the discussions at that meeting and the analysis offered in this paper will lead to a continued, incisive, and vigorous debate about the future of civic engagement in higher education. To participate in that discussion and to find more information about the meeting, go to [www.futureofengagement.wordpress.com](http://www.futureofengagement.wordpress.com).

#### Meeting participants:

- Derek Barker, *Kettering Foundation*
- Rick Battistoni, *Providence College*
- ✓ Harry Boyte, *University of Minnesota*
- Barbara Burch, *Western Kentucky University*
- ✓ Patti Clayton, *North Carolina State University*
- Jeremy Cohen, *Pennsylvania State University*
- Elizabeth Coleman, *Bennington College*
- Julie Ellison, *University of Michigan*
- Eric Fretz, *University of Denver*
- Dwight Giles, Jr., *University of Massachusetts Boston*
- Ira Harkavy, *University of Pennsylvania*
- Matthew Hartley, *University of Pennsylvania*
- Beverly Hogan, *Tougaloo College*
- Elizabeth Hollander, *Tufts University*
- Lorlene Hoyt, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*
- Peter Levine, *Tufts University*
- Nicholas Longo, *Providence College*
- David Mathews, *Kettering Foundation*
- ✓ George Mehaffy, *American Association of State Colleges and Universities*
- Caryn McTighe Musil, *Association of American Colleges and Universities*
- ✓ KerryAnn O'Meara, *University of Maryland*
- Scott Peters, *Cornell University*
- William Plater, *Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis*
- John W. Presley, *Illinois State University*
- John Puckett, *University of Pennsylvania*
- ✓ John Saltmarsh, *University of Massachusetts Boston*
- Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Spelman College*
- Nancy Thomas, *Democracy Imperative*
- Byron White, *Xavier University*
- Deborah Witte, *Kettering Foundation*
- Edward Zlotkowski, *Bentley College*

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

This paper is made possible through support from the Kettering Foundation, the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. For more information on the project associated with this report, visit [www.futureofengagement.wordpress.org](http://www.futureofengagement.wordpress.org).

To cite the White Paper, please use the following format:

**Saltmarsh, J., Hartley, M. and P.H.Clayton (2009) *Democratic Engagement White Paper*. Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education.**