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# peerReview

EMERGING TRENDS AND KEY DEBATES IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

## Civic Learning in the Major by Design



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# CONTENTS

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## FALL 2017

**From the Editor** ..... 3

## ANALYSIS

### Departmental Designs for Civic Impact

Caryn McTighe Musil, AAC&U. .... 4

## PRACTICE

### Civic Learning for All Students

Margaret M. Mulrooney, Melody K. Eaton, and Lisa E. McGuire, all of  
James Madison University ..... 8

### Community Engagement through an Environmental Studies Lens

Jane T. Costlow, Bates College ..... 12

### Literature and Social Justice

Seth Moglen, Dawn Keetley, and Kate Crassons, all of Lehigh University ..... 15

### A Civic-Rich Framework for Liberal Education

Cindy Koenig Richards, Willamette University. .... 18

### Civic Engagement in and out of the Sociology Classroom

Jon Shefner, University of Tennessee, Knoxville ..... 22

### Creating a Civic Lens in African American Studies

Dexter B. Gordon, Grace Livingston, Renee Simms, all of University of  
Puget Sound. .... 25

### Civic-Centered Chemistry and Biochemistry

Cynthia Maguire, Nasrin Mirsaleh-Kohan, and Richard D. Sheardy, all of  
Texas Woman's University ..... 28

### Civic Learning in Interdisciplinary Majors

Nicholas Longo, Providence College, and Monica Fitzgerald and Shawny Anderson,  
both of Saint Mary's College of California. .... 31

## REALITY CHECK

### The Next "Evolution" of Civic Learning

Tania D. Mitchell, University of Minnesota ..... 35

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*“The knowledge, skills, and experiences students need for responsible citizenship should be part of each student’s general education program. But civic inquiry and collaborative problem solving also need to be included in students’ major programs, including programs that prepare graduates for immediate entry into careers.”*

National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement  
*A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future*

**T**he world has changed in numerous and significant ways since 2012, when AAC&U published *A Crucible Moment* and issued its national call to invest “on a massive scale in higher education’s capacity to renew this nation’s social, intellectual, and civic capital.” However, in this current time of fraught political discourse and deep divides across differences, the report’s recommendations are still critically needed. *A Crucible Moment’s* authors assert that students who participate in civic learning opportunities are more likely to develop habits of social responsibility and civic participation. This correlation appears within the work of groups known for fostering engaged citizens, such as the Girl Scouts of the USA.

While conducting research for my book, *Thin Mint Memories: Scouting for Empowerment through the Girl Scout Cookie Program*, I spoke with dozens of adult Girl Scouts about the impact that the organization has had on their lives. Much of this conversation happened at the 2012 Girl Scout centennial anniversary convention, where I interviewed several lifelong members about a range of subjects, including civic and community engagement. What I learned through those interviews aligns with findings from the Girl Scouts’s 2012 alumnae impact study, *Girl Scouting Works*. The report reveals that Girl Scout alumnae of six years or more are more likely to vote than nonalumnae, with 58 percent of those alumnae reporting that they always vote, versus 41 percent of nonalumnae. In that same study, 55 percent of Girl Scout alumnae of six years or more, versus 43 percent of nonalumnae, strongly agreed with the statement, “When I see a problem, I prefer to do something about it rather than sit by and let it continue.” In my own interviews, nearly all the

women with whom I spoke credited their Girl Scout experiences with their desire to help make the world a better place.

By linking educational programming and civic engagement activities, the Girl Scouts and similar organizations provide members with the opportunity to develop the skills and mindsets to make change happen. Providing an undergraduate student with similar opportunities in the major—connecting a student’s academic and professional interests with civic learning—empowers the individual to effect positive change.

Just as being a Girl Scout cultivates skills in community problem solving, engagement with diversity as a college student also promotes democratic outcomes, as research conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California–Los Angeles has confirmed. Sylvia Hurtado, Adriana Ruiz, and Hannah Whang report in a 2012 *Diversity & Democracy* article on findings from HERI’s Diverse Learning Environments Survey that “the more courses students took that included opportunities to study and serve communities in need, . . . materials or readings about race/ethnicity, or opportunities for intensive dialogue between students with different backgrounds and beliefs, the more confident students were in their skills for living and working in a diverse society.”

This issue of *Peer Review*, supported by the Endeavor Foundation, includes articles that explore how civic learning in the major can connect students’ awareness and their actions. Told from the perspectives of faculty from several institutions and majors—including African American studies, chemistry and biochemistry, civic communication and media, English, environmental studies, nursing, interdisciplinary majors, social work, and sociology—these pieces interrogate how departments can use civic engagement lenses not only to enrich learning but also to strengthen students’ senses of personal and social responsibility. This outcome is key because civic engagement experiences, as Wagner College president and incoming 2018 AAC&U Board Chair Richard Guarasci wrote in a 2015 HuffPost blog, “deepen our students’ appreciation of what it means to be an active citizen and give them a hand in tackling the complex problems facing our country and world.” ■

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY

# Departmental Designs for Civic Impact

► **Caryn McTighe Musil**, Senior Scholar and Director, Civic Learning and Democracy Initiatives, AAC&U

**T**his issue of *Peer Review* focuses on how departments can structure the design, expectations, and experiences for all their majors to achieve greater civic impact while deepening students' learning in the discipline. It marks another milestone in establishing education for a diverse US democracy and globally responsible citizenship as nonnegotiable purposes of a college education. Such a commitment does not displace the importance of advancing knowledge or of preparing students for jobs; rather, evidence abounds that it accelerates student learning and self-authorship while also preparing graduates with skills employers seek and a greater capacity to exercise social responsibility in their lives.

Seventy years ago, in the morally numbing aftermath of World War II, the President's Commission on Higher Education issued a clarion call to departments in its six-volume report, *Higher Education for American Democracy*:

The first and most essential charge upon higher education is that at all levels and in all its fields of specialization it shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals, and process. (Zook 1947, 102)

To accomplish that radical aspiration, the commission identified three goals for higher education that "should come first in our time" and can provide a blueprint for departments:

- Education for a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living.
- Education directly and explicitly for international understanding and cooperation.
- Education for the application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and to the administration of public affairs. (Zook 1947)

As part of practicing "a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living," the commission asked for the establishment of a

comprehensive community college system and the end of racial segregation in US colleges. Today, college students are more diverse across all kinds of markers than ever in the nation's history. That achievement expands perspectives, stories, knowledge, and relationships without which students could not become effective "carrier[s] of democratic values, ideals, and process."

In addition to examining who comes to colleges as students, faculty, administrators, and staff, departments have reexamined and expanded *what* they teach. The new scholarship derived from diversity has opened libraries of unread, unstudied, dismissed, and sometimes unrecorded histories of the nation and the world, disrupting unexamined notions about American democracy and its unfinished work.

Coupled with *what* was taught has been the revolution in *how* teaching is done. Student-centered, project-based, and problem-based learning pedagogies are now more routine, along with group work and collaborative learning, intergroup and deliberative dialogues, and service learning, the most popular pedagogy with the greatest influence on student learning. In 2005, the Corporation for National and Community Service reported that 33 percent of American students experience service-learning (Kecskes 2006). By 2014, NSSE data showed that 52 percent of first-year students and 62 percent of all seniors had taken at least one service learning course (Soria and Mitchell 2016).

Finally, *where* students do their academic work has contributed to the evolution of possibilities as departments begin to define more explicitly how they can design education for a diverse democracy through their majors. The campus gates have opened as students engage with communities beyond the campus boundaries to apply "creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems."

## THE DEPARTMENT'S TURN FOR CENTER STAGE

These streams of influence make this an ideal time for departments to seize the opportunity to finally till their own disciplinary



acreage. In 2012, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* echoed the commission's earlier call:

A socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy . . . require[s] informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in 'doing' democracy. . . . Civic learning needs to be an integral component of every level of education, from grade school through graduate school, across all fields of study.

Although there had been an explosion of investments in civic pedagogies, partnerships, and problem solving, such investments were scarce in one of the most fertile, yet fallow, arenas for civic learning: a student's major area of specialized study. The report therefore recommended that higher education defines "within departments, programs, and disciplines the public purposes of their respective fields, the civic inquiries most urgent to explore, and the best way to infuse civic learning outcomes progressively across the major."

AAC&U took up this challenge in 2014 through a pilot project with Chicago colleges funded by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation that resulted in *Civic Prompts: Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines* (2015). With the department as the unit of change, *Civic Prompts* offers a process for reflective departmental conversations to explore a series of questions about appropriate lines of civic inquiry, civic pedagogies well suited to the discipline, assignments that generate civic outcomes, and civic and democratic outcomes that could be achieved through the study of the major.

A grant from the Endeavor Foundation has enabled AAC&U to move from creating a process for rethinking a department's civic dimensions to demonstrating what building civic impact into *the design*

of a department actually looks like. This issue of *Peer Review* offers nine of the strongest and most varied approaches to structuring civic-rich departmental designs among 123 departmental submissions. A new AAC&U website scheduled to go live at the end of January 2018 will provide thirteen more. It will be regularly replenished as innovative designs for majors increase.

### WHY LEARNING IN THE MAJOR MATTERS

Thirty-five percent of a student's time in college is devoted to courses in a major. If departments ignore educating for socially responsible and informed citizenship, the consequences are formidable. It affects not only how graduates will or will not participate in the polity nationally and globally but also what kind of professionals they are likely to become in the workplace. Tolerating civic free zones in majors threatens to weaken US democracy and produce moral blinders at work about decisions that could have significant public consequences.

When trying to follow civic routes through all four years in college, too many students discover "road washed out" signs when they begin studying in their major. Instead of curbing students' civic development, departments need to structure majors so that multiple kinds of civic knowledge, skills, values, and actions are *understood as a dimension of the discipline itself*.

### WHAT'S NEW ABOUT AAC&U'S APPROACH WITH DEPARTMENTS

Focusing on disciplinary investments in civic engagement is not a new idea. But zeroing in on the disciplinary designs for majors is. In 1997, Edward Zlotkowski began his pioneering *Service-Learning in the Disciplines* monographs that eventually covered twenty-one different disciplines before Stylus recast the publication in

2005. What distinguishes the evolution twelve years later is the shift from using the disciplines to influence a single pedagogy—service learning—to using the disciplines to define the civic contours of a department's intellectual terrain and its methodologies of investigation for its majors.

In the late nineties, John Saltmarsh, then a senior leader at Campus Compact, launched the Engaged Department Institutes. The institutes raised significant questions about faculty rewards, and the larger institutional ecology helped departmental civic efforts flourish. But according to examples in Kevin Kecskes's illuminating edited volume, *Engaging Departments: Moving Faculty Culture from Private to Public, Individual to Collective Focus for the Common Good* (2006), the principal outcome for teams was to begin offering service-learning courses within a department. Most participants stopped short of adopting a more comprehensive civic redesign for departmental majors.

Because the driving force at that stage for engaging departments was an almost fixated focus on community engagement as the single means to civic ends, many other modes of civic learning were erased. For example, almost no attention was given to how students might acquire other crucial civic capacities through (1) examining key democratic texts and universal democratic principles, as well as fierce historical and contemporary debates about them; (2) gaining historical and sociological understanding of several democratic movements for greater justice, both from the United States and abroad; (3) expanding knowledge of diverse cultures, histories, and values; (4) interrogating ethical dilemmas in the face of competing rights and responsibilities; (5) becoming adept at navigating political systems; or (6) honing skills in deliberative and intergroup dialogue.

In AAC&U's initiative, Civic Learning by Design in the Major, the unit of analysis



shifts from the individual faculty member teaching a civic-rich course to the collective agreement of a department about how to harness the power of the discipline for public purposes and democratic ends of justice, equity, and social responsibility. In the following *Peer Review* articles, departments describe how such education can be embedded in the departmental *definitions of their disciplines* (Lehigh University/University of Tennessee) and *departmental learning goals* (Bates College/Providence College), in defined understanding of the *public responsibilities of typical career paths* for their majors (Willamette University/James Madison University/Texas Woman's University), or in *intentionally designed community partner experiences* (Saint Mary's College/University of Puget Sound).

### COMMUNITY AND DEMOCRACY

The language of community has gradually, without much notice, displaced the language of democracy in most civic engagement scholarship and its practitioners' vocabularies. That has had deleterious consequences. A community is not the same as a democracy. Community surfaces the language of unity, shared space, and common affiliations. By contrast, democracy surfaces the discomfiting language of rights, justice, equality, voice, and opportunity. And when coupled with diversity, even more discomfiting language arises: difference, exclusion, invisibility, stratification, and inequity.

To address this issue, James Madison University distinguishes between community engagement and civic engagement, but supports both. It wants to be sure students acquire political skills to effect change in the public sphere. Providence College calls its major Public and Community Service to emphasize the twin goals of citizenship and social justice. Civic scholar Tania Mitchell sought to address the issue by coining the term "critical service-learning" (Soria and Mitchell 2016). She challenged

her colleagues to help students "gain a more nuanced and complex understanding of the causes of inequality and oppression." Mitchell goes on to explain, "The distinction between service-learning and critical service-learning can be summarized in its attention to social change, its questioning of the distribution of power in society, and its focus on developing an authentic relationship between higher education institutions and the community served." In moving from service and outreach to social change and more equitable power and agency, democratic ideas are inserted within the softer, less controversial words "community" and "service."

Community engagement is a critical component of education for social responsibility, but democratic engagement is also necessary for responsible citizenship. Departments need to calibrate their disciplinary emphasis as they assume a higher profile as a marked site for civic learning and democratic engagement.

### A MAJOR TRANSFORMATION

In the articles that follow, authors describe in detail how they transformed their majors in intentional ways by embedding civic learning in a latticework of courses in the major, and what such designs look like in practice. With multiple purposes and methods, they seek to increase students' engagement with and comprehension of their discipline's goals—enhance students' voice, self-authorship, and agency; introduce moral, ethical, and civic responsibility issues that are likely to be part of professional lives; and give hands-on practice in addressing challenging public problems in concert with others different from themselves.

None of these institutions would claim their departmental designs are complete. But each has begun a transformation for both faculty and students and waded into intellectually invigorating territory. As Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings assert in

*Citizenship Across the Curriculum* (2010), "When faculty from different disciplinary communities teach their fields wearing a civic lens, both the concept of citizenship and even the field itself (as taught and learned) are subject to change." Instead of a road washed away, then, faculty within these departments have constructed highways where students can press further in civic inquiries, problem solving, discoveries, and inventions, *through the requirements and design of the major*.

These departments are taking renewed pride in realizing that becoming a global and national citizen is deeply dependent on how students use a civic lens as they learn to think like sociologists, nurses, chemists, communications experts, or African American Studies majors. But too few departments have such roads yet. This issue of *Peer Review* gives a glimpse of how to engineer and invent transformative departmental civic designs. We hope it will usher in a profusion of new thoroughfares within departmental majors. The future of democracy depends on it. ■

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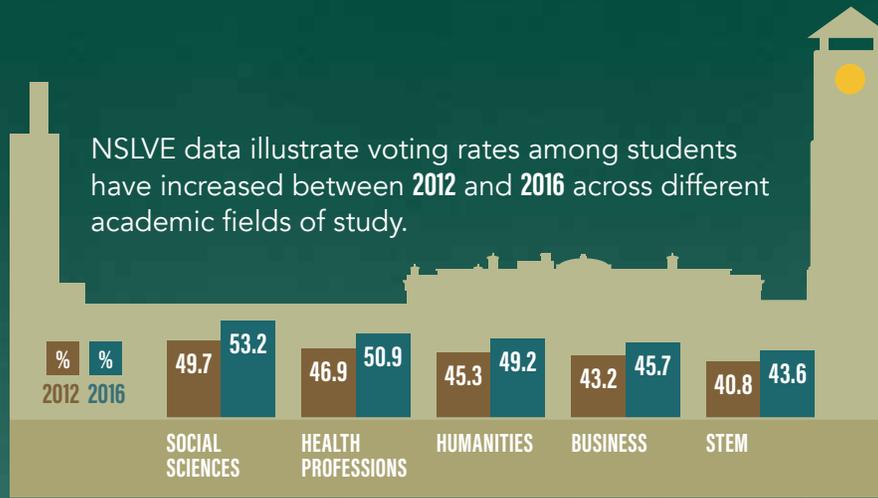
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# CIVIC LEARNING *in the MAJOR* BY THE NUMBERS



AAC&U's employer survey data show there is strong agreement among employers that *all* students, regardless of their chosen field of study, should gain broad learning in democratic institutions and values — **87%** and civic capacity — **86%**

NSLVE data illustrate voting rates among students have increased between **2012** and **2016** across different academic fields of study.



**61%** of seniors responding to a recent NSSE survey shared that they "often" or "very often" connected learning to societal problems or issues in their major. Most majors reported percentages that ranged from **59% - 75%** but physical science, math, computer science, and engineering reported only **38% - 39%**



A recent NSSE survey on civic engagement illustrates a discernible gap between civic awareness and civic action. Whether course-related or not, a much higher percentage of seniors shared they "often" or "very often" participated in civic experiences related to awareness. The percentages drop dramatically when asked if they "often" or "very often" participated in civic experiences related to action.



**SOURCES:**

1. AAC&U survey *Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success* by Hart Research Associates
2. *Democracy counts: A report on U.S. college and university student voting* (2017). Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life
3. The National Survey of Student Engagement, a project of Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research
4. The National Survey of Student Engagement, a project of Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research

**FOOTNOTES from the NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement) data:**

- Field of study categorization is available for 39% of students in 2012 and 59% of students in 2016
- We were not able to remove all non-resident alien students from our sample, so the analyses includes some students who are non-resident aliens and thus ineligible to vote. This produces downward biased estimates of voting rates, particularly among groups that include a disproportionate number of non-resident aliens such as STEM students.

# Civic Learning for All Students

- **Margaret M. Mulrooney**, Professor of History, Associate Vice Provost for University Programs, James Madison University  
**Melody K. Eaton**, Professor of Nursing, Associate Director for Graduate Programs, James Madison University  
**Lisa E. McGuire**, Professor of Social Work, Department Head of Social Work, James Madison University

On November 8, 2016, thousands of James Madison University (JMU) undergraduates lined up at the campus polling precinct to cast their votes. They were laughing and chatting with strangers, snapping selfies, and posting on social media, each student eager to record the memory of that historic event. And that’s a key takeaway from that day—for them, voting in their first presidential election, voting for perhaps the first time ever, was a major turning point in their civic lives. Regardless of how they voted, what matters most is that they participated at all.

Since the 2012 publication of *A Crucible Moment*, more and more colleges and universities are doing their part to reengage young Americans in the political process. This collective work reflects a recommitment on the part of institutions of higher education to fulfill their public purpose, but progress has been slow. A postelection survey by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) suggests that, despite a similar rate of youth (under age thirty) voter turnout in November 2016 compared to November 2012, it may be even harder in the future to get and keep youth politically motivated. Though more engaged and more eager for change than the previous generation, young people disagree over what change is needed and, more important, discount the ability of the traditional two-party system to effect any change at all. As CIRCLE concludes, “Stronger civic education and strategic, intentional youth outreach remains key.”

At JMU, we are intentionally creating an environment in which civic learning is expected for every student. Although our mission statement has long called on us to prepare “educated and enlightened citizens who lead meaningful and productive lives,” the challenges of the twenty-first century prompted us to adopt a new approach that we hope can inspire appropriate changes elsewhere.

First, we decided to promote through our current strategic plan three distinct kinds of engagement: engaged learning, community engagement, and civic engagement. We also created an Office for Strategic Planning and Engagement to track institutional progress within and across these three areas, and we designated an Engagement Advisory Group to provide day-to-day leadership and foster collaboration among the various engagement committees, academic entities, and administrative units that characterize the modern university. Most notably, we established the James Madison Center for Civic Engagement, an office with full-time personnel, an independent budget, and responsibility for coordinating and cultivating the civic competencies of our nearly 20,000 undergraduates. Mindful that we are a public institution, we volunteered to host the new Virginia Campus Compact chapter, sent distinguished representatives to Governor Terry McAuliffe’s Task Force on Millennial Civic Engagement, and annually host community forums and candidate debates. Though not inclusive, this summary suggests the kinds of institutional practices that not only foster the civic ethos that pervades our campus, but also aid the development of civically or politically oriented outcomes across the curriculum and cocurriculum.

## AN OUTCOMES-BASED APPROACH

Civic learning for our undergraduates begins in our general education program, the Human Community, one of the oldest outcomes-based programs in the nation. For twenty years, we have required that students complete one of three unique four-credit courses designed to develop their knowledge of American political traditions and principles, and we have consistently strong evidence demonstrating the success of these courses. More recently, we added an ethical reasoning course to the offerings in our critical-thinking area, and we are piloting a new version of a human



communication course that incorporates deliberative dialogue and public advocacy. In these and other ways, our program nicely aligns with the civic outcomes associated with the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

Academic departments also prepare our graduates for civic and social responsibility; political science, justice studies, and communication studies are all good examples. However, in answering AAC&U's recent Civic and Social Responsibility survey, we decided to highlight the exemplary curricular-design processes associated with the School of Nursing and the Department of Social Work. Housed in the College of Health and Behavioral Studies, these two departments reveal how civic outcomes can be woven into professional programs and majors that often fall outside the conventional paradigm.

### **CIVIC LEARNING OUTCOMES IN NURSING**

The School of Nursing (SON) has developed a civically enhanced curriculum that reflects the faculty's commitment to educating students about the process of enacting health policy and the importance of advocacy for clients, families, communities, and populations. The curriculum also integrates experiential learning opportunities that focus on improved health. It does all this while offering some of the most demanding and daunting academic programs on campus.

Admission to the undergraduate nursing major is regulated by strict progression standards and limited to no more than ninety students each semester or 180 per year. Once admitted, students complete an array of specialized courses like Pathophysiology and Pharmacology and Clinical Applications and Reasoning, yet they also have access (some required and some optional) to a variety of courses

linked to health policy, including some from other departments:

- **Transition to Practice:** Students engage in activities such as creating public blogs on health care or health professional issues requiring a change, and they participate in interprofessional team-based learning activities based on health care advocacy initiatives. Legislators participate in all projects and advocacy events.
- **Healthy Health Policy:** Students explore a policy issue of importance to the local community, analyze available data, and develop evidence-based policy recommendations. Results are disseminated through professional posters and published policy briefs.
- **Rural Health:** Students study, observe, and participate in interdisciplinary assessment, planning, and delivery of community-based primary health care in partnership with residents and agencies of a host rural county. Learning emphasizes rural culture, rural health care, and access inequities.
- **Community Mental Health Practice:** Provides a basis for understanding mental health policy and services. The focus is on the needs of the deinstitutionalized mentally ill patient and includes a service-learning component. The SON requires cocurricular activities to promote patient/client, community, and professional advocacy and civic engagement. These activities are scaffolded to embed them in courses at each level of the program. Students are encouraged to participate in state and national advocacy events. For example, each year students are selected to attend the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's Student Health Policy Summit. This summit culminates in Capitol Hill visits led by nursing deans and directors who meet with federal legislators to advocate for nursing legislation. The educational focus on advocacy and health

policy is promoted by specific recommendations from the Institute of Medicine's report, *The Future of Nursing* (2010), and by accrediting agencies for nursing education, to lead change for better population health.

According to a study by Diane Salvador (2010), 68.8 percent of 347 US nursing students received no education related to health policy, and 66.7 percent of students that did receive this education rated it as minimal to poor. This lackluster emphasis on health policy has been a driving force for nursing accrediting bodies and national recommendations for change. When students enter the program at JMU, they are initially focused on acquiring clinical knowledge and skills; however, by the time they graduate they have received content and experiential learning experiences on the health policy process; the current health care system; the importance of advocating for clients, families, and communities; and civic engagement. And thanks to JMU's nationally known assessment programs, the SON demonstrates annually the effectiveness of our curriculum.

### **CIVIC LEARNING OUTCOMES IN SOCIAL WORK**

As a professional program with clearly stated values of social, economic, and environmental justice, the Department of Social Work also embeds civic learning and social responsibility throughout its undergraduate curriculum. For example, the major's first two sophomore-level courses are:

- **Introduction to Social Work:** This course is an overview of the social work profession with emphasis on various settings and diverse populations distinguished by age, class, race, ethnicity, culture, spirituality, family structure, marital status, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, socioeconomic



status, and national origin, and the implications to social work practice. Introduction to Social Work focuses on practical experiences designed to enable students to gain familiarity with the dynamics of the profession.

- **Social Welfare:** This course introduces societal responses through history to basic human needs with an emphasis on social welfare policies. It focuses on socioeconomic realities across diverse segments of US society with a global context. Social Welfare explores professional, societal, and personal values in the development of responses to human needs.

In these classes, students complete a mandatory community service-learning project and a required advocacy project. Students also participate in an interprofessional poverty simulation that sensitizes them to issues of economic injustice. These required activities begin to build the lens declared majors need to see how course content has practical applications in the community as well as how their voice matters in creating change.

Once they enter the junior level, students must complete Social Policy, which involves participating in a legislative advocacy day in Washington, DC, in the fall, or in Richmond, Virginia, in the spring. To develop their civic competencies, students in this course follow a bill and arrange to meet with their legislators to discuss it face to face. Then, during their senior year, all social work majors take Social Work Practice in Macro Systems, where they

work in small groups to effect community change through education, research, or intervention methods. Each semester, faculty preplan several projects, including one that focuses on voter education/mobilization.

The Department of Social Work also relies on strategic cocurricular activities to promote students' civic competencies. Each year, the department and a student-led social work organization cosponsor a social work celebration that recognizes outstanding alumni and community representatives who challenge students to make a difference locally and nationally. The theme for the 2017 celebration was Water Is Life, and our featured speaker provided multiple examples of public advocacy for environmental justice. Similarly, the department sponsored a bus to the Women's March in Washington, DC, where students and faculty together let their voices be heard for the rights of women and other vulnerable populations.

The essential facilitating factor for this curriculum is our profession's commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice. The typical student in the United States comes to social work with a plan to work directly with clients and their families, and lacks awareness of the employment opportunities to address the social justice mission of the profession (Wolk et al. 1996). It is necessary to provide curricular and cocurricular experiences to allow students to grow in this area. The Social Work faculty at JMU

has embraced the importance of civic learning beyond what might be expected for a relatively small department of eight full-time faculty. Course content is scaffolded to allow students to learn, simulate, and apply their knowledge in the areas of human rights and policy practice. Through curricular mapping, the faculty identified specific program driven assignments (PDAs) to achieve essential learning outcomes, one of which concerns human rights and social justice and another that focuses on social policy practice. These PDAs provide accountability to ensure that all majors achieve the stated outcomes for the program. In keeping with JMU's nationally known assessment programs, the Department of Social Work demonstrates annually the effectiveness of this approach for student learning.

### **COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES FOR CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS**

The School of Nursing and the Department of Social Work have successfully collaborated on university-wide projects that provide interprofessional education that enhances and supports civic engagement in the health professions. The Health Policy Collaborative (HPC), for example, provides an infrastructure for research for practical policy solutions and a platform for experiential learning about advocacy for improved health. Developed by the School of Nursing in 2014, its university department partners include Social Work, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Health Sciences, Dietetics, and the College of Business. The synergy that occurs when two or more departments work collaboratively on advocacy initiatives is certainly one aspect of JMU's success.

The HPC's signature event is the annual Health Policy Summit (HPS). Both the School of Nursing and the Department of Social Work plan the HPS,





a half-day, interprofessional experience involving 250–300 students and collaborating groups of experts from multiple fields. Using Michaelsen and Sweet’s (2008) team-based learning model, the summit goes beyond content in the major to apply concepts and solve problems through small-group interactions.

Prior to the summit, students receive information about a “hot topic” health care policy from either the state or federal level. On the day of the summit, students are placed into dozens of interprofessional teams based on both major and experience with policy advocacy. Members of each team take an individual readiness test and group readiness test and discuss their group’s answers with faculty facilitators. These are teachable moments when faculty help students consider different perspectives on current policy matters.

The student teams then participate in a problem-solving exercise focused on that year’s “hot topic.” In 2016, for example, students considered the results of the politically charged decision in Virginia to turn down federal dollars for Medicaid expansion. Using an interactive activity entitled Mind the Gap, each team developed a proposal for providing care and coverage to 400,000 Virginians left uninsured. No matter what the “hot topic” may be, students must also create poster presentations that advocate for their proposals. Significantly, local legislators attend the summit, walk through the gallery of poster presentations, and talk with the students. The summit concludes when the student participants choose the three best proposals and the winning teams present their plans to the legislators and summit attendees. Faculty research on the summit appears in a peer-reviewed journal, *Nurse Educator*, and elsewhere.

A second example of collaboration for civic engagement is a recently renewed Rural Health course. This class, which has a service-learning requirement, is cross-

listed between nursing and social work and focuses on the challenges of health care in a rural area. In planning this course, the social work professor developed a relationship with Remote Access Medical (RAM), a national organization that organizes weekend-long clinics in medically underserved areas across the nation. RAM provides medical, dental, and optometric services at no cost, often in high schools or even the county fairgrounds. Nursing and social work students enrolled in the course must attend a weekend clinic in rural Virginia. Back on campus, class discussions focus on the policy implications about the need for programs such as RAM and the importance of healthcare access.

### A NEW CIVIC VISION

As JMU’s commitment to civic engagement continues to grow, we hope that more departments will consider adopting a civic lens for their majors. We recognize that, in some cases, external accrediting agency demands, disciplinary proclivities, or progression standards may pose challenges. Faculty in our College of Education revised a summer course to include an innovative community outreach program through which our pre-service teachers work with refugee families to provide literacy enrichment activities. Education faculty have also organized and led summer study abroad programs to Ireland, Costa Rica, England, and South Korea to promote global civic competency in our students. As these projects suggest, there are as many ways to promote civic learning outside the classroom as there are inside.

We have come a long way since the first JMU civic engagement task force convened to craft an institutional position statement and approach. A *Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future* was a key text that that committee used to guide its work, and it has continued to shape the ethos here

(National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012). In the intervening years, we have made even greater strides. Under the leadership of President Jonathan R. Alger, we have a new civic vision to be the national model of the engaged university—engaged with ideas and the world—and we are proud members of AAC&U’s Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement project, Campus Compact, and the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Finally, we are making our link to James Madison, chief architect of the US Constitution, clearer. “Learned institutions,” Madison wrote, “throw that light over the public mind which is the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty. . . . What spectacle can be more edifying or more reasonable than that of liberty and learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual and surest support?” Madison’s words ring as true today as they did in 1822. Our role as a “learned institution” is clear. ■

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# Community Engagement through an Environmental Studies Lens

► **Jane T. Costlow**, Program Chair, Environmental Studies, and Clark A. Griffith Professor, Environmental Studies, Bates College

Situated within a state strongly identified with pristine nature, our central Maine campus provides a fabulous “laboratory” for both environmental science and civic engagement. To take full advantage of this fortunate situation, Bates College’s Environmental Studies (ES) program includes community civic engagement in many, if not all, of our classes and major requirements. Questions about community, diversity, and civic life help our students grapple with the complexity of environmental challenges, pushing them to consider the many kinds of knowledge essential to addressing problems at both local and more global scales. We strongly believe that a liberal arts environmental educa-

science interact with other ways of considering the meanings and histories of place.

Bates is situated in the Lewiston-Auburn community near the Androscoggin River, which was once cited as among the most polluted rivers in the country because of its upstream paper mills. American statesman Edmund Muskie, a champion of the environment and instrumental in the passage of the Clean Water Act, was a Bates graduate and native of Rumford, upriver from Lewiston-Auburn. Now a vibrant but economically struggling postindustrial city, Lewiston-Auburn’s diversity has grown exponentially in the last two decades with the welcome arrival of many Somali and other African immigrants.

*All our students, regardless of their concentration, complete a two-hundred-hour internship, write an independently conceived senior thesis, and take a capstone course (usually in their senior year) that involves intensive collaboration with a community partner.*

tion can richly inform our students’ future lives, regardless of where our students wind up and whether they continue in a field that is directly related to the environment. Civic engagement is also integral to ES courses in the natural sciences. Central to how the Bates ES program “does” civic engagement is the question of the sciences’ role in evaluating and improving the environmental health of human, plant, and animal communities, and how the discourses of

## LEARNING THAT ENGAGES COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

All students in the Bates ES major take a combination of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and in addition to these “core” courses they pursue a more focused group of courses within a concentration. Students most interested in the natural sciences may choose either an Ecology and Earth Systems track or an Ecology and Economics of the Environment track; the

first allows students to pursue increasingly advanced work in both individual sciences and interdisciplinary topics (soils, watersheds, conservation ecology) that draw on multiple fields. The Ecology and Economics track is more focused on public policy but requires students to do advanced work in the natural sciences, on the assumption that well-crafted policy must be grounded in the understanding of ecological dynamics. All our students, regardless of their



concentration, complete a two-hundred-hour internship, write an independently conceived senior thesis, and take a capstone course (usually in their senior year) that involves intensive collaboration with a community partner. The ES major is one of the largest at Bates (where the total on-campus enrollment is approximately 1,700), with between thirty-five and forty students in an average graduating class.

Within the natural sciences, courses deal both with the physical, chemical, geological, and biological processes occurring in a wide variety of landscapes, and the ways in which all those processes intersect with cultural, social, and economic factors. Learning that engages the real problems or perspectives of the community is a great way to highlight the intersection of these spheres. Those problems have taken students into an examination of the toxicity of cyanobacteria in the local unfiltered drinking-water supply, and they have involved studying soil characteristics on poor agricultural land being farmed by recent immigrants. While these are examples of science driven by existing social and cultural realities, other classes might undertake something closer to a study of Lewiston itself as a physical-chemical-biological-social-cultural system.

Studies of Lewiston as a complex system happen both at introductory and advanced levels. In an introductory environmental science class, students collect data on Lewiston (housing stock, trees, neighborhood characteristics), look at the data relative to census data, and contextualize all the data in terms of urban ecology—social/political and biological. At the other end of our curriculum, in the capstone class, work like this is developed more extensively when a group of students works with a community partner on a project of the partner's definition. But, well before their senior year, our students are asked to think about a range of questions regarding civic life and structures, com-

munity values, diversity, and empowerment—and the modes and genres that one might use to communicate and invite broad participation.

In an introductory environmental science class, students examine data from the lake that supplies our drinking water and are expected both to be able to explain the physical, chemical, or biological processes at work behind the data and to consider the implications of the data and watershed management decisions for the public drinking-water supply.

In a conservation biology course taught by a member of the biology department (the Bates ES committee includes four faculty appointed in the environmental studies department and six faculty from other departments), students apply the skills they learn in class to carry out community-engaged learning projects, assisting several local organizations with conservation missions. Students work to provide information to gardeners interested in planting native species, they map invasive plant species on properties belonging to a local land trust, and they develop educational materials for a local nature sanctuary.

Natural science and humanities faculty periodically “merge” classes as a way of illuminating how different disciplinary perspectives can come into dialogue. Thus, students in two separate classes read different materials on fracking and climate change and then attended *either* class to prompt a discussion that drew on perspectives from scientific literature *and* histories and cultures of place. (See the Bates College Environmental Studies Learning Goals and Objectives in Figure 1.)

### APPLYING ACADEMIC SKILLS TO REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS

From its inception in the mid-1990s, the ES program has required a two-hundred-hour internship of all majors, fulfilled through work in a broad range of community organizations, NGOs, and field research settings.

Some students do their internships in central Maine, others complete them in their home communities, while still others use the internship as an occasion to explore a setting that may be very different from what they're used to—in terms of physical environment or human community. Wherever they complete their internship, they are asked to reflect briefly in written form on its significance as part of their ES major (some students also do public presentations). These internships often provide direct experience of the role of science in public life, at

#### FIGURE 1. BATES COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Environmental Studies is by its very nature concerned with our lives in community—both human communities and community expanded (as Aldo Leopold put it) to include the more than human. We make this explicit in our statement of learning goals and objectives:

Environmental Studies as an academic field is the product of efforts to understand and respond to the variety of changes humans have wrought in our world. Students in Environmental Studies are motivated by concern for the welfare of the many human and non-human communities that shape this planet. The Environmental Studies Program actively cultivates in our students both engagement with and informed reflection about those communities. To this end, the curriculum includes (1) an interdisciplinary core that encourages students to explore the social, aesthetic, ethical, scientific, and technical aspects of environmental questions; (2) concentrations that allow students to approach these questions with more focused knowledge and methodological tools; (3) a community-engaged research course; and (4) an internship with an environmentally focused organization or business. <http://www.bates.edu/environment/learning-goals-and-objectives/>



the community level, in the implementation of policy, or in environmental education settings where students become public science educators (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2. BATES COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES INTERNSHIP EXAMPLES**

From student evaluations on completion of their internship:

I worked as a technician at an environmental consulting company where my primary role was serving as the office manager for a grassland survey conducted on an Indian Reservation. . . . In addition to office work, I also spent days in the field surveying the prairie and using plant ID to classify areas into ecological states from which cattle stocking rates could be derived. . . . This internship pushed me harder than I had ever been before. . . . I grew emotionally, professionally, environmentally, and gained life skills that can only benefit me in the future.

I worked with a small group of environmental consultants at various sites, conducting wetland delineations, forest stand delineations, wildlife surveying and control. The consultant I worked with is a bird breeding surveyor who works closely with companies, county/state government, and engineers to make sure sites are following environmental regulations.

I worked in a laboratory setting investigating anomalies in chlorophyll-a concentration in the Southern Ocean and the Tasman Sea. I worked with two mentors, and used MATLAB to analyze satellite data. . . . I concluded the internship by creating a poster and giving a talk to explain my work. I learned a lot about conducting scientific research through discussing work with my mentors. . . . Thanks to the location of the lab, we can directly see the problems that the ocean is experiencing and brainstorm experiments and solutions.

The capstone course—team taught and now offered every semester—pairs groups of three to four students with community partners to work on a project. (Bates’s Harward Center helps identify and develop potential community partners.) These projects have ranged widely—from working with a local museum to tell the history of our local river, to developing questionnaires about storm-water runoff, to helping a local farm evaluate the potential for renewable energy installations. This course stretches our students to apply academic skills in a real-world situation. All projects are publicly presented at the end of the semester, many involving presentations to local civic groups and boards. For some of our students, this is probably the first time they’ve gone to a city council meeting! The science involved in these projects can range from hands-on monitoring of local streams to complicated calculations of river flow and daylight intensity; many of the projects demand that students think about various kinds of legislation, from flood-zone restrictions to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission dam licensing. Among other things, students grapple with community expectations and just how high the stakes can be. In one recent project, a group of local architects and entrepreneurs were hoping to convert an abandoned mill building into a showcase of renewable energy and green agriculture. Just how much light would be coming through the windows and ceiling casements? How much light and water would different potential crops need if the old mill were to become a greenhouse? What was the potential for power generation from the river at different times of the year and at different water levels? Finding answers to these questions stretched the students’ skills with calculus, botany, and physics, but it also confronted them with how to *communicate* what they found out to their community partners. Students learned to translate complicated calcula-

tions into lay terms while diplomatically letting community partners know that their exciting visions might not be feasible. The learning curve for everyone—students, faculty, and partners—was steep. Students don’t always have “fun” doing a project like this, but they are making invaluable contributions to the community—and they are learning something about the interface between the academy, the community, and the dynamics of decision making that is invaluable. A list of capstone course projects relating to the Androscoggin River can be found at <http://androscoggin.bates.edu/home/community-projects>.

**EMERGING TOPICS AND CAMPUS CHALLENGES**

As Environmental Studies continues to think about bringing science and civic cultures into conversation, there are many things that still challenge us and emerging topics that call out for attention: How can we attract a more diverse group of students (in a discipline many people still associate with wilderness)? How can the efforts of faculty in community-engaged learning be better “counted” in tenure and promotion cases? How can we assess the impacts of community-engaged learning both for our students and for our community partners? A new colleague, hired last year, brings expertise in urban environmental issues and regional food systems, and other campus colleagues are in conversation about how to collaborate on an interdisciplinary course on climate change. Both of these topics challenge faculty and students to think about why and how the science of an issue “matters”—and how it can best be communicated in specific, culturally complex settings. We strongly believe that a liberal arts environmental education can richly inform our students’ future lives, regardless of where our students wind up and whether they continue in a field that is directly related to the environment. ■



# Literature and Social Justice

- ▶ **Seth Moglen**, Associate Professor of English, Lehigh University
- Dawn Keetley**, Professor of English, Lehigh University
- Kate Crassons**, Associate Professor of English, Lehigh University

**A**lmost a decade ago, the Lehigh University English Department made a commitment to literature and social justice (LSJ) as the central intellectual emphasis of our department. Through this focus, we explore how literary texts make distinctive contributions to urgent ethical, social, and political questions that cross disciplinary and historical boundaries. This commitment has influenced all our faculty hires over the last eight years, it has systematically reshaped our graduate program, and in a range of ways it is now influencing our undergraduate major. Our department has twenty-two tenured or tenure-track faculty, thirty-four graduate students, and roughly forty-five English majors. We are also responsible for administering and staffing the two-semester writing program required for incoming Lehigh students.

Our emphasis on LSJ emerged through a department-wide process of intellectual community building and goal setting. The university administration asked the English department (along with other programs) to identify an intellectual “signature” that would establish the distinctiveness of the department—both for prospective students and on the broader academic landscape. At the same time, the English department was seeking to develop ways to encourage cross-period collaborations in our small PhD-granting department. Over a period of several years, we came to recognize that our research and teaching in various fields were united by a consistent engagement with ethical and political questions. We thought this engagement could be fruitfully described as an inquiry into LSJ, a thematic approach that was capacious enough to include most faculty members, but also specific enough to create a distinctive departmental identity.

## THE LSJ INITIATIVE

We began the LSJ initiative by collaboratively writing a mission-statement over the course of a year. All our faculty—including a

classicist, rhetoric and composition specialists, creative writers, and scholars of literature from the medieval period to the twenty-first century—participated in shaping this document, although our LSJ committee did much of the initial drafting and final revisions. We worked hard to write an inclusive statement that spoke to the research and teaching most of us do. We also emphasized how LSJ contributes to the mission of the university itself.

Our mission statement captures the spirit and goals of our LSJ emphasis, although it is a fluid document that will change as our department changes. As we explain at the outset:

The English department's focus on literature and social justice comes from a shared sentiment among our faculty that we all have obligations to our fellow human beings, to our students and colleagues, our families and neighbors, and to strangers we will never meet in places we will never go. Whether articulated in medieval Catholic theology or modern Marxist thought, in the paintings of Rembrandt or the poems of Whitman, in the woods of Concord or the sound stages of Hollywood, this ethical and philosophical perspective envisions the world as a place where people are bound to one another in a network of mutual responsibility, where the rights of all human beings must be recognized.

We believe that the study of literature, mapping the contours of what it means to be human—our aspirations and anxieties, our histories and hopes—is essential to the work of social justice. We come to know others by the stories they tell, even as we determine who we are by the stories we tell ourselves.

The English Department's full mission statement on LSJ can be found at <https://english.cas2.lehigh.edu/content/mission-statement>.



Our development of this initiative coincided with the growing national crisis in the placement of humanities PhD students in tenure-track jobs, as well as declining enrollments in humanities majors at universities around the country. It has enabled us to respond to both these challenges in American higher education in ways that we hope will prove successful. It has enabled us to rethink graduate education in ways that link literary study to the public humanities and to forms of public-sector social-justice employment that include but are not limited to tenure-track options. Enrollments in our undergraduate major (and minor) have remained strong, and we suspect that this success has been reinforced by the departmental emphasis on social justice and public-facing scholarship.

We have defined LSJ learning opportunities and outcomes for our master's program, and we will next consider how these goals could be adapted for the undergraduate English major. We have implemented a required seminar for all first-year master's and PhD students in Theories of Literature and Social Justice. And the department has just this year developed a required capstone seminar for all master's students, which will provide an opportunity for students to revise a conventional literary critical seminar paper as a public humanities project.

### LSJ PERMEATING THE ENGLISH MAJOR

Since we began with the revision of the graduate curriculum, the LSJ initiative has not yet restructured our undergraduate major to the same degree. We are now beginning to consider that curricular work, although the intellectual priorities of the LSJ initiative have already inevitably permeated the English major.

A quick survey of the English department's fall 2017 course offerings illustrates

this trend. In one entry-level course taught this coming fall by one of our advanced PhD students, undergraduates will study why poetry matters in the twenty-first century, and they will have opportunities to attend local poetry slams and to consider the role of poetry in exploring social dynamics and social justice issues in our community. In another entry-level course, Introduction to Latinx Literature and Culture, a faculty member will lead students in exploring the relevance of issues raised in contemporary Latinx literature through service-learning placements with nonprofit organizations



that serve the local Latina/o community—and through service-learning journals that reflect on those placements. In a seminar for advanced English majors, *Women and Revolution in Early America*, students will analyze a range of literary and historical texts in order to assess the ways in which women's aspirations for new social and intellectual opportunities, and for more ambitious kinds of liberty and independence, were and were not forwarded by the project of the American Revolution. And a course called *Modernism, Mourning, and Social Justice* will enable students to think about the ways in which early twentieth-century writers created literary works that mourned the exploitation and alienation

that pervaded American life—and they will then have opportunities to speak with unemployed steelworkers in the city of Bethlehem about their own strategies for mourning lost jobs, pensions, health plans, and forms of labor in our postindustrial city.

The more detailed description below of three Lehigh English professors' courses will suggest the diversity of our offerings at the undergraduate level, all of which take seriously the notion of civic responsibility for the English major.

### POVERTY AND REPRESENTATION

Kate Crasson's course explored how literature foregrounds the complexities of poverty as a force that encompasses both economic realities and psychological dispositions, spiritual ideals, and political visions of justice. Kate taught texts ranging from the Bible, Franciscan writings, and the fourteenth-century allegorical poem *Piers Plowman*, to more modern texts like *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, George Orwell's novel, and *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich's best-selling exposé on the working poor in modern America. Kate's course asked that students acknowledge poverty as a lived experience, present beyond the classroom walls. To this end, they performed twenty hours of work at a local Head Start classroom, the South Bethlehem Neighborhood Center, or the New Bethany Ministries's homeless shelter and soup kitchen. In conjunction with the diverse content of the course, engagement with members of the community (including low-wage Lehigh workers who were clients at the soup kitchen) helped to foster students' exploration of poverty as a condition with multiple causes, meanings, and manifestations. Throughout the semester, students attended to the relationship between the literary modes and material reality of poverty: How are



poverty and poor people represented in a variety of literary texts? In what ways have the poor represented themselves? How does the practice of interpreting a literary work relate to “reading” the signs of poverty in the bodies and speech of people themselves?

### ARGUING DIFFERENTLY

In this course, Barry Kröll tackled how we think about *argument*, a word that seems inevitably to evoke a conflict between opponents, the goal of “winning,” and the effort to overpower the opposition. Barry’s course was designed to focus instead on different ways to engage in conflicts and address disagreements without resorting to adversarial tactics. Barry led his students in learning tactics associated with “transformational” approaches to arguing, drawing from work on negotiation, mediation, organizational leadership, and conflict resolution. As a critical part of his project of helping his students “argue differently,” Barry had them meet in a “lab” for an extra period each week. Here, his students explored patterns of physical movement and habits of mind that support arguing as *conflict transformation*, including movement exercises (adapted from tai chi, aikido, and Japanese sword fighting) that provide physical analogues for arguing. Students also engaged in some contemplative (or meditative) exercises designed to cultivate composure, attentiveness, and awareness. Barry’s course, in short, trained students in interwoven physical movements and qualities of mind that support practices of conflict transformation, habits that students honed in both their written and verbal communication.

### #BLACKLIVESMATTER

James Braxton Peterson’s course excavated an African American literary history of resistance for the contemporary

Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Formulated in the aftermath of the shooting of Trayvon Martin, Black Lives Matter organizers and activists have worked consistently to establish an intersectional emphasis on the identity politics of social justice movements. James’s course juxtaposed the emergent texts of and about the BLM movement with the black writers who have been writing about black lives mattering since the arrival of captured and enslaved Africans in America—writers such as Sherley Anne Williams, Ida B. Wells, Charles Chesnutt, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin. The course introduced students to the long and powerful history behind the BLM movement, offering diverse models of resistance to racist oppression that are sometimes about one historical moment and sometimes for all historical moments.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE DIMENSIONS OF OTHER COURSES

Because our first-year writing courses are designed and taught by our graduate students and faculty, these classes are also shaped by the department’s LSJ emphasis. In fall 2017, for instance, the syllabus for the new instructors included a unit on cultural constructions in which students will watch Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017) and read Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me* (2015), using both works to examine how race plays a crucial role in the ways people build (often unjust) assumptions about the world, themselves, and others.

We could easily describe the social justice dimensions of numerous other courses we offer at the undergraduate level every semester. In most of our courses, in fact, students learn how the study of literature can enable them to map deep structures of domination, inequality, and injustice in the societies in which they have been produced. They also learn

how the study of literature across a wide range of historical periods can provide them with ways of imagining more just and equitable societies.

Some of our courses contain service-learning components, others involve forms of university–community collaboration supported by the South Side Initiative; Health, Medicine, and Society; Africana Studies; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and other programs on campus. Many of our undergraduate courses are also characterized by an increasing focus on the development of multiple literacies (diverse modes of writing; digital communication and publication skills; documentary filmmaking) to enable students to communicate to broader and more varied audiences.

Lehigh was best known until the 1980s as an engineering school—and in more recent decades, its large undergraduate business college has gained increasing centrality to the university. Because of these strong undergraduate technical and business programs, the university has not had, by and large, an especially strong social justice (or even liberal arts) orientation. But our LSJ initiative has nonetheless thrived at Lehigh. The university’s desire for humanities programs to develop a distinctive focus empowered our faculty to rethink both graduate training and undergraduate education in literary studies. The university’s practical orientation has also provided a setting in which our effort to define the broader social relevance of literary studies has been legible and well-received. Our experience at Lehigh may thus serve as a useful model for other departments and programs at institutions that might at first seem to be unpromising environments for explicitly cultivating a curriculum focused on “civic learning and social responsibility.” ■

# A Civic-Rich Framework for Liberal Education

► **Cindy Koenig Richards**, Associate Professor of Civic Communication and Media and Ringe Media Lab Director, Willamette University

**H**ow can we better prepare students to address contemporary problems and contribute to the public good? What if we rethink the way we teach our discipline to make civic learning central to our department? How might we build a framework for civic-rich *liberal* education that can prepare students for professional success and to lead lives of purpose and meaning? Inspired by our students as well as the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, these questions animated faculty efforts to rethink the focus, curriculum, and name of our undergraduate communication department at Willamette University.

Today, students and faculty in the Civic Communication and Media department draw on the classical liberal art of rhetoric to engage public issues. Building on intellectual histories that illuminate rhetoric's important role in democracy, as a department we aim to foster *rhetorical agency*, "the capacity to act, that is to [communicate] in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's community. Such competency," Karlyn Kohrs Campbell wrote in 2005, "permits entry into ongoing cultural conversations and is the *sine qua non* of public participation." With this goal in mind, we developed a curricular framework for civic-rich liberal education. This framework is designed to give students a strong foundation in our discipline, on which we build diverse projects that engage civic issues, student interests, and faculty strengths.

Since its advent in 2014, the Willamette Civic Communication and Media department has become one of the highest enrolled majors. Students and alumni report high satisfaction with the program, particularly the challenging projects at its core. In addition to improving student experience and enrollment, centering civic learning increased our department's capacity to hire talented and diverse faculty, to attract grant funding, to address contemporary issues and media, and to maximize the strengths of our people and location.

To share our approach to civic learning in the major, I'll first outline the process through which we redesigned the department. Next, I'll describe the curricular framework we use to provide a civic-rich education in our discipline. Finally, to illustrate how we build on this framework—and why its flexibility is a strength—I'll highlight a few recent Civic Communication and Media projects.

## RETHINKING OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

Willamette University is a highly selective private liberal arts university in Salem, Oregon. Founded in 1842, Willamette is the first university established in the western United States, and our historic campus is located directly across the street from the Oregon State Capitol. Willamette's core commitments include academic excellence, preparing global-minded students for meaningful lives of professional achievement, and civic engagement.

At Willamette, faculty led a two-year process that resulted in the adoption of a new department curriculum with a civic spine. In 2012, we participated in an external program review. While this review recognized strengths of the department, including its focus on rhetoric and rigor comparable to a master's-degree-level program, it also identified significant opportunities for improvement. During the review, for example, "students noted that despite the proximity of the state government on campus, there appeared little if any use of state agencies as learning laboratories in communication issues," and they called for more opportunities to transform knowledge into action.

Drawing on what we learned from the program review and what we knew from our experiences, department faculty worked to envision ways to sustain the rigor of the program while adapting its design to better prepare students for life beyond term papers. We studied peer and aspirant institutions,



focusing not only on communication departments but also interdisciplinary initiatives such as the Engagement Lab at Emerson College and the Center for Democratic Deliberation at the Pennsylvania State University. We surveyed scholarship, drawing insight and inspiration from contributions including *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, *Connected Learning*, and *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*.

As we worked to connect what we saw as best practices with our specific situation, we considered Willamette's strategic plan as well as insights from ongoing conversations with Willamette students, alumni, colleagues, and other community members. Next, in 2013, I drafted a program revision proposal, including a new major curriculum and a new minor curriculum. Following department discussion and approval, Robert Trapp and I presented the program proposal to the College of Liberal Arts. Because Willamette is faculty governed, the Academic Programs Committee as well as the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts voted on the proposal. With a strong show of support, these governing bodies approved the Civic Communication and Media program in 2014.

Today Civic Communication and Media is a top major at Willamette; in 2017, enrollment in the major ranked fourth among forty-eight programs in the College of Liberal Arts. To advance Willamette's mission and accommodate student demand, the Civic Communication and Media department hired three new tenure-track faculty in three years. As the program continues to develop, our framework for civic-enriched liberal education allows us to engage new strengths, needs, and opportunities in our community while remaining grounded in our discipline.

### A FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIC-ENRICHED LIBERAL EDUCATION

The Civic Communication and Media major is designed to provide a flexible framework for civic learning that is rooted in a strong foundation in our discipline. Two required courses, Rhetorical Theory and Analyzing Public Discourse, develop a shared understanding of disciplinary history, theory, and methods. Then, elective courses and projects provide opportunities for students to transform knowledge into civic action. Prior to graduation we expect every Civic Communication and Media major to meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Pose and develop answers to significant, manageable, relevant questions about civic communication and media.
2. Identify, synthesize, and evaluate relevant scholarship related to significant questions about civic communication and media. Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of methods of inquiry in rhetoric relative to other liberal arts.
3. Become familiar with competing theories of rhetoric, and with the reciprocal influence of media and public culture upon one another.
4. Become familiar with historically significant uses of communication and media to address controversies, to constitute communities, and to effect change in public culture.

5. Make cogent critical arguments that demonstrate understanding of methods of inquiry in rhetoric, and that contribute to ongoing conversations about civic communication and media.
6. Make public arguments in multiple modes of communication, including writing and speech. Adapt theories of rhetoric to practices of civic communication and media.

One place students demonstrate mastery of these outcomes is Senior Seminar. In this required capstone course, seniors complete a major project that contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations regarding communication and media practices that foster civic engagement. The first Civic Communication and Media graduate's major project illustrates

*As the program continues to develop, our framework for civic-enriched liberal education allows us to engage new strengths, needs, and opportunities in our community while remaining grounded in our discipline.*

how seminar students connect academic knowledge, vocational interests, and civic learning. With an eye toward a public service career, the student researched digital rhetoric strategies for women in politics. After reviewing existing scholarship, she conducted interviews with high-ranking public officials who identify as women, and she analyzed social media data. She then shared her findings by writing a thesis manuscript as well as producing a more widely accessible "guide to social media use for women in politics." Before graduation, she accepted a job as director of communication for the National Foundation of Women Legislators.



## **BUILDING ON OUR FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIC LEARNING**

Between foundational courses in theory/methods and capstone projects in Senior Seminar, Civic Communication and Media majors complete elective courses that often challenge them to transform knowledge into action. This curricular framework supports disciplinary integrity as well as innovation and deeper learning. Below, I highlight a few examples of the diverse, civic-rich projects Civic Communication and Media students and faculty have built on our framework. To help illustrate development over time, these examples appear in chronological order.

### **ENGAGING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: DEBATE WATCH**

Shortly after I joined the Willamette faculty I inherited a course on public sphere theory, which examines how the concept of the public leads to rhetorical and political action. To incorporate civic learning into this course I created two projects.

The first project, Willamette Debate Watch, aims to bring together community members to view political debates, discuss public issues, and build civic engagement. As students study public sphere theory, they transform knowledge into action by working with Debate Watch and facilitating civic dialogue at the events. In 2012 and 2016, Willamette Debate Watch events led by my students drew more than 1,500 participants on campus. In 2016, my students also developed strategies to facilitate engagement via social media, connecting with journalists, scholars, civic leaders, alumni, as well as students from more than twenty-five campuses across the United States during the debates.

The second project, *Networked Publics*, aims to contribute through research to ongoing conversations about digital media in civic life. In 2016, this lab project focused on the role of Twitter in the 2016 US presidential campaign.

With grant support from Willamette's Mellon Foundation-funded Learning by Creating initiative, a department alumnus worked with students and me in the lab, strengthening connections between academic research, career pathways, and civic action. Before the inauguration of the forty-fifth US president, our lab released a collaborative, self-published book entitled *Networked Publics in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign*. In a letter accepting *Networked Publics* for presentation at the 2017 HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory) conference, reviewers characterized the book as "a project that perfectly marries digital humanities, data visualization, connected learning, participatory learning, and contemporary politics."

### **ENGAGING LEARNING LABORATORIES: INTERNSHIPS**

In 2014, one of our faculty members developed an internship course for Civic Communication and Media majors to increase opportunities for students to connect what they are learning in the major with action in the community. All internships in the majors focus on communication and media work, yet student placements are diverse; recently a student interested in food justice interned at Marion Polk Food Share, while a student who aspires to a sports marketing career worked with the Portland Trailblazers. Capitalizing on our proximity to state agencies, in 2017, one of our Civic Communication and Media majors served as the first strategic communications fellow in the Oregon governor's office.

### **ENGAGING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: CHINA DEBATE EDUCATION NETWORK**

Willamette University received a \$3 million grant from the Open Society Foundation to create a sustainable

debate network in the People's Republic of China. During the three-year grant period, Willamette worked with 380 Chinese universities and almost 6,000 Chinese students to teach methods of public speaking, argumentation, and debate. Constrained by the fact that this program had to conform to the laws and regulations of the People's Republic of China, we did not explicitly say we were training students in democratic philosophies; we taught debate and public speaking in a way that conformed to principles of civic engagement. In 2016, three of our department faculty participated in the China Debate Education Network, and this international partnership continues to enrich civic learning in our department courses, including *Arguing about the Right Thing to Do* and *Ethics of Public Argument*.

### **ENGAGING CIVIC MEMORY: OREGON BLACK PIONEERS**

Several courses allow students to engage the role of public memory in civic life, focusing on modes of communication through which histories are collected, curated, and circulated. In *Remembering Emmett Till*, first-year students studied representations of Till and then took a tour through the Willamette Valley to learn about memorial projects dedicated to Oregon's African American history. The tour served as inspiration for students to design memorial projects to commemorate histories they felt lacked recognition. One student chose to commemorate the formation of the Black Student Union at Willamette. Building on this project, the student applied for and won a competitive research grant that funded her study at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York. She will present her findings in an exhibit at Willamette's Hatfield Library during Black History Month and in a three-article series in our *Collegian* newspaper. She also now



works at Willamette's Center for Equity and Empowerment.

### ENGAGING CAMPUS COMMUNITY: ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA

In Asian American Media, students planned campus film events for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. Through this project, students connected knowledge developed in the course to community needs, devising ways to use media to promote dialogue, challenge racial injustice, and build community.

### ENGAGING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: LA CHISPA

La Chispa (or "The Salem Spark") is a project that seeks to enhance Willamette University's communication about its sustainability contributions and challenges while collaborating with diverse partners in Salem and in the larger Willamette Valley. This student-centered project is committed to uncovering and uprooting environmental racism, addressing the inequities of environmental privilege, and advocating for environmental, climate, and energy justice. Guided by nine Willamette University undergraduates, La Chispa seeks to enact communication praxis, including by developing workshops with Willamette Academy students and coordinating a weekly radio segment on KMUZ community radio. The radio program seeks to amplify perspectives and experiences that often are marginalized in dominant sustainability discourses and yet are essential for creating a just and equitable community. La Chispa connects with department courses including Media and the Environment, and this approach to civic learning won grant support from Willamette University's Green Fund.

### DEVELOPING AGENCY AND ENGAGING CIVIC LIFE

The development of a new focus, curriculum, and name for our communication

department empowered us to engage students in civic-rich liberal education. The framework that now structures Civic Communication and Media supports the integration of practices and values that animate a healthy democracy. Philosophically, a curricular structure that purposefully opens space for faculty and student influence is also consistent with our department's aim to foster rhetorical agency—the capacity to act, the competence to have an influential voice in matters. As we move deeper into the twenty-first century, we hope to continue to build on our department framework in order to address emergent civic needs and opportunities. ■

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## AAC&U MEETINGS

### NETWORK CONFERENCES

#### General Education and Assessment

February 15–17, 2018  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

#### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Democracy

March 22–24, 2018  
San Diego, California

#### Global Engagement and Spaces of Practice

October 11–13, 2018  
Seattle, Washington

#### Transforming Undergraduate STEM Education

November 8–10, 2018  
Atlanta, Georgia

### ANNUAL MEETING

#### Can Higher Education Recapture the Elusive American Dream?

January 24–27, 2018  
Washington, DC

#### PRE-MEETING SYMPOSIUM

#### The Power of Civic Engagement—Across Campus, Within Communities, Beyond Borders

January 24, 2018

#### 9TH ANNUAL EPORTFOLIO FORUM

January 27, 2018

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# Civic Engagement in and out of the Sociology Classroom

► **Jon Shefner**, Professor of Sociology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**T**homas Ehrlich gave us good guidelines when he defined student civic engagement as “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” (Ehrlich 2000, vi). As useful as this definition is, I suggest we need to consider specific times and places in thinking through the civic engagement needs and contributions of students, faculty members, and communities. How does civic engagement look to a sociology department in a university in the mid-South? How do we try to contribute in the current political, social, and environmental moment? Answering those questions requires some understanding of the context, and contradictions, that we face every day.

*Our commitment to rigorous scholarship has never wavered, and we are mindful of our obligations to seek the best data possible.*

## CULTURAL CONTEXT AND CONTRADICTIONS

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) is located in one of the biggest cities in Appalachia. Knoxville is still a home to a mountain culture that continues to have great resonance for many of its residents. That culture has been simultaneously preserved and celebrated for its beauty and resilience, on one hand, and commodified and stereotyped, on the other hand. The mountain

areas are a source of pride and tourist dollars, but those same mountains have suffered strip-mining and mountaintop removal, with subsequent ill health and pollution.

East Tennessee affiliated with the Union even though the rest of the state and region went Confederate. This allegiance may be meaningless to many readers, but for many in this area, those ideological divisions of almost 170 years ago remain. Non-southern readers should understand there is a very real and virulent neo-Confederacy movement thriving in the South, including Tennessee. Our state was the home of Nathan Bedford Forrest, the ex-Confederate general and slave trader who founded the Ku Klux Klan. But East Tennessee is also the home of the Highlander Research and Education Center, a famed social movement school that played enormously important roles in the southern labor movement, and the civil rights movement, and more recently

continues to be an organizing hub for the movements for immigrant and LGBTQ rights and Black Lives Matter.

## UTK'S SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECT

Recognizing the contributions and contradictions in the place and time in which we live, the UTK Sociology department decided to pursue an

umbrella project of social justice as an organizing structure for our scholarship and teaching. Our website articulates our mission this way: “A major goal of sociology is the application of (this) knowledge in the pursuit of human welfare and social justice, and the development of fair, effective, and sustainable institutions and policies.” Many of us had engaged in organizing or consulting work that built on our scholarship. As individuals, we had



already found homes in peace and justice movements, the environmental justice movement, and in action against mass incarceration and for immigrant rights. As we recognized that we commonly used our scholarship to contribute to social justice movements, we deliberated about how to amplify that work in serious and varied ways. Our commitment to rigorous scholarship has never wavered, and we are mindful of our obligations to seek the best data possible. Yet as we gathered data, we simultaneously forged a culture that supported not only traditional research publishing, but also using that data and our skills to think through ways to make wider community impacts. The ways we make those impacts range from traditional community talks to expert witnessing to bringing our expertise to social movements. Our commitment to tangible impacts was nurtured when UTK was given a Carnegie designation as an engaged university, which provided further legitimacy for the work we are doing. Recently, the university has embarked on a quality enhancement project in service learning, which again affords some additional institutional backing.

Our social justice project has had significant influence on how we think about engagement. In doing so, we've revised the full undergraduate and graduate curricula. At both our undergraduate and graduate levels, our entry-level classes address ways to think about social justice by first defining social injustice—the stratification of life opportunities by race, class, gender, sexuality, and sexual identity, and the intersections among them. As our students come to understand the inequalities that confront us, they are pushed to think about ways to challenge them throughout the curriculum. Undergraduate students can choose to pursue a general sociology major, or to specialize in environmental sociology, critical criminology, critical race and ethnic studies, and soon in

political economy; graduate students also have those four options. Classes in each area examine how specific institutions structure inequality and the patterned ways that people experience those inequalities. But those classes also unpack ways to think about addressing injustice through the rigorous examination of data and the application of theory that leads to action.

Three classes that cross the undergraduate specialty areas help the application of data and experience. Our applied methods class pushes students to select a semester-long project to research. In these days of “fake news,” it is crucial that stu-



dents have the opportunity for extended research into controversial issues. Recent topics of that class, and others with similar aims, include the Flint, Michigan, water crisis and immigrant rights. Our professors take students well beyond the failure of social institutions to understand the racial and class components of how citizens were failed in Flint, and to understand the historical construction of immigrants as a political problem. Another class offers the whole class a semester long investigation of privilege while placing students in a social change organization. The structure of these classes offers students not only the ability to do research on local and tangible issues, but also a perspective on how organized groups pursue social change.

The other class that builds on our critical examination of our specialty areas is our internship class, in which we create opportunities for students to work in semester-long relationships with social justice organizations. The groups with which we've partnered to find placements for students include community schools, community legal facilities, local refugee service providers, public defenders, and an organization training disadvantaged youths in job skills pertinent to the green economy. Importantly, our student interns also attend class and read and discuss materials designed to help them understand their work experience through sociological lenses on race and ethnicity, work and organizations, and the political economy, among other fields. Our engagement work is further nurtured in our classes in community sociology, social values and the environment, political sociology, social movements, and globalization and social justice—all of which provide real-life examination of current data to offset the increasingly difficult process of sorting through multiple sources of information. As data become clearer to students, our professors provide greater opportunities to put those data to use in the community.

### ENGAGEMENT IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

Engagement, to us, also means bringing scholarly communities together with others. To that end, we've held several conferences that extend beyond concerns of academics. These include conferences on the role of the university in struggles for social justice, on inequalities manifested in environmental extraction and environmental injustices, on ways to build the local green economy, on new directions in critical criminology and new directions in critical race and ethnic studies, and on labor and social change. These conferences have been organized



by departmental faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and interdisciplinary colleagues. But we've been careful at these conferences to reach out to community participants as presenters and audiences, and they have proven to be important venues for students and faculty to interact with workers in community organizations, local government, small businesses, and political organizations. Out of these conferences have come further opportunities for collaboration and career development.

Other ways we express our engagement is in response to specific issues and moments. UTK has unfortunately also been designated as a campus unfriendly to LGBTQ students by advocacy groups. This label was reinforced during a series of legislative assaults on institutions that fostered diversity at the university, including an office of diversity in the chancellor's cabinet. The funding for that office was stripped by legislative action, with quiescent response by the university administration. During this controversy, sociology faculty members and students played significant parts in the critical response to the administration's action and inaction. Amidst this threatening storm, our sociologists were there to advise, nurture, and support student-centered groups such as the UT Diversity Matters Coalition, the individuals leading those efforts, and individual students that sought comfort. Because of our consistent presence at demonstrations, rallies, meetings, and more, students always knew to whom they could turn during ongoing moments of struggle. In addition to supporting students, UT's sociology professors took a leading role in circulating letters to faculty members and professional associations, seeking to support UT's diversity institutions and personnel. Here too we relied on our professional expertise, as UT sociologists study the roots of exclusion and oppression. Our

research helps illuminate obstacles in the way of meaningful diversity and interculturalism.

### AN EXEMPLAR OF DIVERSITY

We also aspire to be an exemplar of diversity on the UTK campus and have taken many steps to that end. First, we took a critical look at our advertising for new faculty lines to create language that was more likely to attract diverse faculty. This change has worked to attract more applicants of color, even for positions in which the number of potential applicants is very small and the competition for those applicants is fierce. Our success has been demonstrable, as five of seven of our recent faculty hires were women and/or people with diverse backgrounds. Second, we revised policies regarding our annual graduate recruitment event. In the past, we have invited our top twenty-five candidates to attend. Last year, the Graduate Committee discussed how each factor in admission decisions (GRE scores, grades, letters of recommendation, personal statements) have been shown by research to disadvantage minority applicants. We decided that the "top twenty-five" invited to our showcase would include all applicants of color so that we would have better information on applicants that might otherwise not rise to the top of our pool. One positive outcome was that after we met and interacted with a student whose application materials looked "average," he became our top recruit and is contributing greatly to our department. This year, we had ten students of color at our annual showcase and at least three who are sexual minorities.

We are an active department in other ways as well. In addition to our traditionally defined research work, many of us pursue what is often called public sociology. Other traditions call this work action research; regardless of the label,

we are active in real and sustained ways that have impacts across the city, the state, the nation, and the globe. We work on immigrant rights and on anti-death penalty, anti-sweatshop, anti-racist, environmental, and union issues. We bring our scholarship to bear on real questions and take real action that has genuine consequences. We do this in ways that make significant and lasting difference to a variety of oppressed groups. We ally with or sponsor many progressive student organizations such as Oxfam, Students Who Stand, Student Peace Alliance, Young Democratic Socialists of America, United Students Against Sweatshops, UT Diversity Matters Coalition, and the Progressive Student Alliance. Some of the work those students do is heartbreaking in its beauty, its pain, and its need. We stand with their struggles just as we stand with others, and occasionally we stand alone. We are members and leaders in a variety of other action-oriented groups. All of this work is carried through paying attention to methodological rigor and theoretical nuance.

Long ago, one of sociology's founding figures, Max Weber, argued that academics had to remain distant from an expression of their values as they pursued their research. The notion of engagement questions the viability of that stance. Engagement as practiced at the UTK Sociology Department suggests that academics' role is to be actively working in the community, supporting and leading, using our data and theory skills, and examining our time and place to see what contributions we can make in the search for social justice. ■

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# Creating a Civic Lens in African American Studies

- **Dexter B. Gordon**, Director, African American Studies, University of Puget Sound  
**Grace Livingston**, Professor, African American Studies, University of Puget Sound  
**Renee Simms**, Assistant Professor, African American Studies, University of Puget Sound

In fall 2016, the University of Puget Sound became the first liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest to offer an African American Studies major. The breakthrough represented by this achievement is significant. However, even more striking for us is that this moment honored the unique institutional and community legacies of questioning and praxis, collaborations and struggle, to which the development of African American Studies at the University of Puget Sound belongs. The moment also marked a threshold in the impact of our efforts to build an intellectual endeavor grounded in a critical integration of the field's two foundational principles: rigorous scholarship and responsible social engagement. For us, the civic lens for African American Studies finds its vision and practice at the nexus of these principles.

Such an understanding of and orientation to civic and public engagement form an essential facet of the pedagogical commitments of the African American Studies major in the way that it permeates the scaffolding for student learning. Such learning includes the achievement of specific program goals that are incorporated in every African American Studies course syllabus and discussed in every course. Students in our program (1) acquire sophisticated knowledge of African American and other African diasporic experiences; (2) become conversant with the roles of race, power, and difference; (3) cultivate rigorous transdisciplinary skills in analytic, reflexive, and community-based research methodologies; (4) develop critical, intellectual, and ethical perspectives that can guide and advance personal, educational, civic, political, and professional actions; and (5) engage and interact with differential sites of community development and leadership in the Puget Sound area and

beyond so as to deepen and apply their understanding of African American Studies and to learn to contribute collaboratively to the ongoing work of equity.

At the University of Puget Sound, our capacity to develop a major positioned toward the civic in this way was influenced by the fact that the development of African American Studies here has involved the building of the Race and Pedagogy Institute (RPI), with its mission of educating students and teachers at all levels to think critically about race, to cultivate terms and practices for societal transformation, and to act to eliminate racism. The institute's Community Partners Forum (CPF) is pivotal to fulfilling the integrity of this mission. The forum works as an essential part of the enactment of the institute's founding principle of fostering collaboration between the university and its surrounding community. The building of the institute alongside the related ongoing pedagogical work of African American Studies scholars across the campus and beyond have together elaborated the conceptual parts, cultivated the relationships, shaped the scaffolds of support, constructed and made visible sites of engagement, and reoriented the structures of reward and recognition which have crafted our curricular and pedagogical civic lens. Given African American Studies's abiding awareness of its historical debt to communities of color for their sustained democratic enterprise of pressuring institutions of higher learning, particularly predominantly white institutions, to desegregate their curricula and campuses and redress their exclusionary terms and practices, we continue to be intentional in our efforts to build a program that grounds civic engagement as a core feature of the liberal arts education sought by a range of students.



## INFUSING THE CURRICULUM

Establishing the contours and terms of the civic lens in which the African American Studies major rests involved a deliberate execution of what we have come to call an infusion approach or framework. This approach was strategic and pedagogic, emerging out of faculty deliberations early in the development of the program's dedicated courses, which attended to our own campus and community contexts while examining emphases in broader national debates about the social, institutional, and intellectual role of African American Studies. We understood this model as allowing us to focus on influencing, connecting with, giving to, and learning from the wider curricular, intellectual, and civic life of the campus and beyond through active sharing of the ideas, literature, discourses, and practices of the field. This infusion would also serve to enrich African American Studies and strengthen its sense of presence. Thus, courses are intentionally developed and placed strategically in the Puget Sound curriculum to ensure that students across the university, and not only African American Studies majors and minors, take these courses with their explicit requirements of civic and social engagement.

This infusion framework for African American Studies also influenced, even as it was influenced by, the work of RPI. This critical connection was central to scripting the institute's first strategic priority aimed at transforming the culture of curriculum practice to foreground sustainability and responsiveness as central to the enactment of Puget Sound's educational mission. Such a reciprocal influence is evident in our modes of building critical pedagogies in which emphasis is placed on learning and teaching as a multidirectional process in contrast to a one-way transaction between teachers and learners. Teachers and learners in the

encounter are encouraged to be aware of their contexts, their identities, and their shared accountability in making and using knowledge. Such an approach includes the promotion of a reflexivity that challenges self and others, as well as notions that educational engagement ought to be apolitical, ahistorical, and value neutral.

Another connecting point in the development of our infusion approach is that it has happened against a backdrop of the university's Civic Scholarship Initiative and its broader mission focused on developing students' intellectual and moral capacities, and their appetites for learning. The initiative articulates Puget Sound's commitment to civic engagement beyond the campus and provides resources to support this engagement. African American Studies developed its civic design for the major within this context as a way to enact a grounded application of the institution's mission.

Additionally, African American Studies seeks to elaborate and translate the workings and educational mission of the campus so as to connect them to our external responsibilities to the world. We present African American Studies and the RPI's innovative and dynamic approaches to pedagogy as case studies to inform critical learning and teaching practices at Puget Sound. These efforts include the placement of subaltern voices as germane to the narration of Puget Sound's new stories and possibilities. For RPI, the complex sets of situated spaces and social relations signified by the concept of community are central to the imagination and instantiation of our work. Especially for liberal arts institutions like ours, engagement with communities is an imminent and historical priority. RPI's community engagement is grounded in an acknowledged debt that educational institutions like ours owe to communities long exploited for their resources and long excluded from the

project of exploring, remaking, producing, and applying knowledge. For African American Studies at Puget Sound, our civic lens includes a focus on subaltern voices as part of a process of redress for this historical wrongdoing, especially where the knowledge produced has been used to exclude the members of beleaguered communities from the terms of what it means to be human.

Alongside our efforts to infuse the curriculum with a civic lens we have structured course assignments and curriculum requirements to ensure that all our students have ample opportunities to explore the varying dimensions of rigorous and responsible scholarship. For example, students majoring in African American Studies are required to take a course in public scholarship or civic engagement. This course provides students the opportunity to connect their coursework with RPI. In so doing, students fulfill one of the tenets of African American Studies, the production of scholarship and public programs that effect change and impact lives. RPI articulates six key principles developed in our CPF as part of our ongoing work together with our community partners. These principles include *responsiveness*—the imperative to act dialogically in concert with our partner communities in the face of dynamic changes and emergent crises at the nexus of race and society; *reciprocity*—the practice of mutually respectful and reflexive give and take; *coherence*—a focused commitment to reflect an integrity of purpose in all the multiple facets of our work; *synergy*—garnering the cumulative benefits from our strongest connected selves; *sustainability*—generative practices and relationships that heal, support, and reenergize; and *flexibility*—the agility to carry and engage the full arc of our learning in ways that enable us to adjust productively to the changing needs of campus and community.



In addition to a Public Scholarship course, majors are required to take Methods in African American Studies, which provides a thorough grounding in the literature and research areas. Students are taught to investigate historical, cultural, economic, religious, political, and literary phenomena and are encouraged to formulate new thinking based on thoughtful reflection on personal and community experiences. Alongside our public scholarship and methods courses, our requirement of three other upper-division courses aims to ensure students develop critical, intellectual, and ethical perspectives to guide their collaborations in continuing work of justice and fairness.

These other upper-division courses include Thinking Ethically: What Is Justice?; Communication and Diversity; and a capstone course, Research Seminar in African American Studies. In this seminar, students employ the range of methods and understandings gained through our introductory course and further studies in the major to complete an independent research project or paper that involves engagement with community partners.

### REORIENTING OF REWARD STRUCTURES AND RECOGNITION

Another way in which we crafted our civic lens was by rupturing the traditional faculty reward structure to foreground civic scholarship. We make explicit in this structure that civic teaching and service are scholarly endeavors that are both valued and expected. The African American Studies Standards and Processes for Evaluation note:

Inherent in the philosophy of the program is a commitment to applying African American Studies' theoretical and critical insights, informed by the program's interdisciplinary focus,

outside of the classroom. For African American Studies, work outside the traditional classroom and in the community is an important feature of academic citizenship. Hence, African American Studies faculty are usually expected to make use of their expertise as scholar/teachers beyond their assigned classrooms.

Further, community service is treated not as an “add-on” but as an integral program component:

For African American Studies, community service is an important feature of academic citizenship. . . . The program recognizes that relevant community service is related to professional qualifications and expertise. Such service is a highly valued feature of the program.

Not only did we rupture traditional understandings of what counts as appropriate priorities for our reward and recognition structure, but we work collaboratively with a range of faculty colleagues across campus.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATIONS

We work with other faculty outside of African American Studies to build relationships across disciplines, departments, and programs. Such efforts reflect the transdisciplinary consciousness of our field. In establishing these relationships across disciplines, departments, and programs years ago, we were not only building and strengthening our minor, we were engaged in a practice consistent with our field's questioning of disciplinary construction. Our collaborations were further facilitated by the possibility and necessity for interdisciplinary work that is one feature of our small liberal arts college.

In order to provide a robust range of courses to constitute the major, we work with colleagues across a range of academic departments and programs including Communication Studies, Psychology, Latin American Studies, English, Theater Arts, Philosophy, Art, Latinx Studies, Politics and Government, Gender and Queer Studies, Environmental Policy and Decision-Making, and Education. Because we are a relatively small program with four dedicated faculty lines, some of which we share with other departments, African American Studies could not on its own offer the full range of courses necessary for a major that would enable our students to develop the capacity, commitment, and competence necessary to fulfill its intellectual and civic goals.

### BUILDING ON AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES'S UNIQUE STRENGTH

Building the African American Studies major was an intentional undertaking grounded in the unique history of the social and intellectual struggle of a people for a place in the pantheon of formal institutional knowledge production, excavation, development, and deployment. Such an endeavor was spearheaded by faculty steeped in the historical and intellectual commitments of the discipline and aided by faculty and staff colleagues invited to share as full partners in the effort. All of these partnerships were developed through sustained cultivation of efforts for more than a decade. Such cultivation included focused faculty retreats and joint efforts on courses and special projects—some of which were done through RPI. This is the unique strength of African American Studies: by connecting the dynamics of race, identity, community life, and knowledge, it can become a catalyst for the transformation of the liberal arts. ■

# Civic-Centered Chemistry and Biochemistry

► **Cynthia Maguire**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Texas Woman's University

**Nasrin Mirsaleh-Kohan**, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Texas Woman's University

**Richard D. Sheardy**, Professor and Chair, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Texas Woman's University

To attract more women and people of color to major in chemistry, Texas Woman's University (TWU) is seeking to address the gap by making clearer how chemistry and biochemistry address real-world issues. We seek to do that most dramatically in our courses for nonmajors, but we have also embedded new pedagogies and relevant problem solving as an unavoidable dimension for our majors. TWU is the largest US public institution primarily for women, with over 16,000 students and a student population that is 88 percent women. TWU is ranked tenth nationally by *US News and World Report* for diversity and our 2016–17 graduating class in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry was 79.2 percent women and 25.0 percent African American, 8.3 percent Hispanic, 8.3 percent Asian and Asian Pacific, and 58.3 percent white. In contrast, American Chemical Society (ACS) members are 23 percent women and 2 percent African American, 4 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian and Asian Pacific, and 80 percent white.

The transformation to how the department teaches its courses today with a more student-engaged, hands-on, and civic approach to our subject matter began ten years ago when a TWU team of faculty and administrators attended the annual summer institute of the SENCER (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities) project in 2007. A science education reform project funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), SENCER advocates teaching through unsolved public issues and incorporating civic engagement in science courses to enhance student learning. Over the past decade as more faculty from our department attended SENCER meetings and learned new approaches to teaching, civic engagement activities have been incorporated into all the science (SCI) courses for non-science majors at TWU, including Sustainable Physical Science

(SCI 1114), Climate Change (SCI 3133), and Community Conversations in Sustainability (SCI 3013). SCI 3013 is the first course in our certificate titled “Science, Society and Sustainability” and is team-taught by faculty in chemistry, government, and business. TWU has been so successful in adopting a SENCER approach to courses for nonscience majors that the institution now hosts the SENCER Center for Innovation-Southwest (SCI-SW), which serves as a resource for civic engagement and student learning among college and university faculty and administrators in the southwestern United States. In addition to hosting an annual symposium on science education and civic engagement, SCI-SW also visits other institutions in the region to present faculty development seminars and workshops on incorporating civic engagement into courses, programs, and undergraduate research. The way we reformed how and what we taught in our courses for chemistry majors has been propelled by the university's 2012 adoption of an experiential learning program as our Quality Enhancement Plan, as mandated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, to invest in a sustained campus-wide initiative to improve student learning and retention. Thus, incorporating civic engagement into our majors' curricula is aligned with university initiatives as well as SENCER and AAC&U philosophies. Further, it is incumbent on us to not only help students learn chemistry but also to develop important skills such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and personal and social responsibility. Incorporating civic engagement into our curriculum helps us to achieve these goals.

Although we had relatively rapid transformation of departmental courses for nonscience majors into civic-centered ones, it has been a slower, more deliberate process using different strategies to incorporate civic and social responsibility into the science majors' courses (chemistry and physics) since the content is tra-



ditionally understood as being rigid with a strong emphasis on coverage. However, progress came more easily when we realized as a department that content will not be sacrificed if provocative civic questions are creatively incorporated into the activities of laboratory components for these courses. Further, it has been well established that linking content to real-world issues positively impacts student learning (Carroll 2012). What follows is a brief description of how we have incorporated civic engagement into our majors' curricula.

### FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCES FOR MAJORS

A typical degree plan for a chemistry or biochemistry major begins with a two-semester sequence of general chemistry, with both lecture and laboratory. Within those sequenced courses, we have incorporated several laboratory experiments that address, directly or indirectly, social issues such as sustainability, water quality, and safety while also teaching basic laboratory skills. The lab manual was specifically chosen for its emphasis on real-world applications, sustainability, and applied chemistry. For example, one of the lab experiments is converting aluminum from an aluminum can into Play-Doh, illustrating the importance of recycling and reusing and the importance of sustainability. Further, this laboratory course introduces the concepts of green chemistry to our students. Green chemistry is an ACS initiative to achieve 100 percent sustainability in the chemical industry by reducing chemical wastes, using more benign procedures for chemical synthesis, and reducing the overall environmental impact of chemical enterprises on the planet while increasing economic viability.

The issue of safety in these courses is civically framed as a personal and social responsibility. Students learn how their

unsafe behavior can damage property and lead to injuries to themselves and others. In our department, as in the chemical industry, safety is the first priority. To assess teamwork in core courses, we place students in small groups to prepare presentations on safety issues such as safe lab attire, proper handling and disposal of chemicals, or how to respond to a spill or fire. In the context of civic responsibility, these students were told their work would be used for future safety training.

### SECOND-YEAR EXPERIENCES FOR MAJORS

The second year of a typical chemistry/biochemistry major's degree plan is a two-semester sequence of organic chemistry, which is the ideal course to expand the discussion of green chemistry while incorporating green principles into the laboratory. We started our path to greener chemistry after attending the 2009 Green Chemistry and Engineering Conference sponsored by ACS and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Since that time, we have sent two students to this meeting to learn how to incorporate greener practices into the undergraduate organic chemistry lab. ACS and the EPA realize that the chemical industry has not always been concerned with environmental stewardship and, as a result, have developed twelve Principles of Green Chemistry to ensure better practices to protect the planet. TWU now has, for example, experiments that use water rather than hexane as a solvent (safer, less toxic reagents); use a microwave technology (less energy needed); and use sunlight as a catalyst (free, nontoxic catalyst). This year, organic chemistry lab students will also be developing safety videos specific to their course.

All chemistry and biochemistry majors are also required to take calculus-based physics lecture and laboratory courses. The labs incorporate civic engagement

assignments. One of the projects focuses on understanding energy conversion. Students research a device (e.g., an energy-generating treadmill) that converts human kinetic energy into electric potential energy. Students compare human energy to carbon-based commercial electricity and learn why renewable energy sources affect the environment differently.

### UPPER-DIVISION EXPERIENCES FOR MAJORS

#### Climate Change/ Instrumental Analysis/ Environmental Chemistry Project

Typical of most chemistry/biochemistry degree plans, our upper-division courses include biochemistry, physical chemistry, inorganic chemistry, instrumental analysis, and quantitative analysis. In order to embed a stronger civic dimension in our curriculum and to raise questions of public responsibility, we also offer environmental chemistry focusing on roles of chemical species and processes in both natural and human-made water treatment systems. As part of this course, through a partnership with Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa in Brazil, four environmental engineering students from Brazil visit us in Texas, and four of our students go to Brazil to compare wastewater treatment systems. This partnership emphasizes the importance of global perspectives on environmental water issues.

Another strategy we are using to thread civic questions of public responsibility into courses for our majors is to create thematic interactive clusters of courses designed for chemistry majors and for nonscience majors. Along with the Environmental Chemistry course, for example, this fall we offered Instrumental Analysis as well as an SCI course, Climate Change. The professors teaching those courses collaborated to create joint projects that involved all three courses. One project focused



on water quality in our Trinity River watershed, the major source of water for both humans and wildlife in our area. Students collected river water samples at various locations for lab analysis. After recording the GPS data for the sample, simple tests for pH, turbidity, and oxygen content were performed on site. The samples were then taken to the chemistry labs at TWU for determination of metals, volatile organic compounds, and other contaminants by standard analytical techniques. Hence, students were carrying out a collaborative research project on a civic issue (water quality) involving collection and analysis of data as well as learning the content their courses demanded. Finally, these classes presented the results of the project on posters at a poster session, which is a way to engage a larger audience with a significant public issue that impacts the health of people, the environment, and public policies.

### Presentations in Chemistry and Biochemistry

The department has a seminar course, required of all our majors, that includes two activities for students related to social responsibility and ethical behavior in research. First and foremost, all students must complete the Responsible Conduct of Research online training, which teaches ethics related to research. A second activity is watching the documentary *Haber*, the story of German chemist Fritz Haber. Haber fixed nitrogen that allowed chemical production of fertilizer to increase food supplies, but he also invented the first weapon of mass destruction—chemical warfare used with deadly force in World War I. At the end of the film, we discuss ethics in science and civic and moral responsibility. Students write a paper about the film addressing ethical concerns related to scientific research.

### Undergraduate Research

Chemistry and Biochemistry undergraduate majors are encouraged to do research. The research projects in our department have their roots in civic issues and include the interaction of DNA with anticancer drugs, the design of solar energy collection materials, the design of optical sensors for environmental pollutants, and disease- and age-related applications of glutathione. Since the environment and health are capacious, complex public issues, students learn the potential and limitations of science in support of public policy formation.

### Other Activities

All research students prepare posters for the annual Chancellor's Creative Arts and Research Symposium, as well as for presentations at regional and national disciplinary conferences, to learn professional science communication skills. As part of their training, students are asked to prepare a second "public" version of their poster for presentation to general audiences. By learning to reduce jargon and describe highly complex scientific studies in a manner most well-educated people can understand, student researchers can be better equipped to share the significance of their work with others and are better at addressing problems collaboratively. As we guide students through the steps essential to acquiring the needed communication skills, we shepherd them from novices to becoming professional scientists. Simultaneously, they become better at sharing their science knowledge with the public and policy makers, an essential civic engagement skill for the scientifically literate in this century.

### GRADUATING CHEMISTS WHO APPLY CIVIC LENSES

At this stage in our infusion of civic issues, values, pedagogies, and skills for

our Chemistry and Biochemistry majors, we have scaffolded questions of social responsibility across all four years. By introducing important civic issues into the first-year chemistry course, students are challenged to start thinking civically. We have threaded significant global civic challenges across several years through issues like energy sources, water quality, and environmental concerns about toxic chemicals. Students are challenged to consider how they might contribute to a more sustainable planet. By clustering civically rich courses for nonscience majors with science majors' courses that focus on how to test water quality in a nearby river, students experience civic agency and the power of data. Communicating what we do as scientists to those who are not scientists is becoming more essential to enable an informed citizenry to make decisions for the public good.

We realize there is much more we can and should be doing to transform our department so our majors learn civic and social responsibility *by design*, not by accident. And we are excited to push toward newer frontiers in our reforms. While changes in the traditional ways of teaching Chemistry and Biochemistry are often met with pushback and require a change of culture, we can see measurable progress. We continue to invest in faculty development and to look for civic-minded faculty who are innovative problem solvers in our new hires. Ultimately, our graduates will be knowledgeable professional chemists who apply a civic lens to their practice of our discipline. ■

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# Civic Learning in Interdisciplinary Majors

► **Nicholas Longo**, Chair and Professor, Providence College

**Monica Fitzgerald**, Associate Professor and Director, Justice, Community, and Leadership Program, Saint Mary's College of California

**Shawny Anderson**, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts, Saint Mary's College of California

The development of academic programs focused on civic learning has been an essential dimension of the next generation of community engagement on college and university campuses. Our programs at Providence College and Saint Mary's College of California provide two examples of what Dan Butin and Scott Seider have chronicled as a "new intellectual movement" (2012, 1) in higher education to offer majors, minors, and certificate programs to prepare students to be democratic citizens. The work of citizenship and social justice then becomes about much more than off-hours volunteerism or a single course of study. Rather, through the study of "public and community service" and "community, justice, and leadership" at Providence College and Saint Mary's, respectively, we offer a sustained developmental curriculum grounded in real-world engagement and public problem solving.

Our programs integrate community engagement in an interdisciplinary set of sequential courses that empower students to develop leadership and organizing skills while working towards positive social change. Thus, students are not forced to choose between an area of study and a desire to change the world. And at the same time, by infusing civic engagement within academic majors on campus, students gain valuable experiences that prepare them to connect the responsibilities of citizenship with their future careers. In short, students' work as civic practitioners begins with their college majors.

## PROVIDENCE COLLEGE'S DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICE STUDIES

Beginning in 1993, Providence College was among the first campuses to make "a major commitment" (Battistoni 1998; Hudson and Trudeau 1998) to civic learning for what would become a new major and minor in Public and Community Service Studies

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under the administrative umbrella of the then newly created Feinstein Institute for Public Service. Supported by a \$5 million grant from Rhode Island philanthropist Alan Shawn Feinstein, the Public and Community Service (PSP) curriculum was initially developed by a team of eight faculty and three students, along with four community partners, "from the ground up as an interdisciplinary, developmental, experientially grounded, liberal arts curriculum" (Morton 2012, 90). The college approved the curriculum in 1995, with the first minors graduating in 1996 and the first majors graduating in 1997. Originally established



as an interdisciplinary program, PSP was granted department status (with dedicated faculty lines) in 2007 and currently supports not only the major and minor, but also several courses that meet the civic engagement proficiency in the core curriculum of the college. Through 2017, 228 majors and 254 minors have graduated from Providence College with a degree in Public and Community Service Studies.

The departmental curriculum has students work towards a set of competencies focused on areas such as “eloquent listening” and storytelling, writing and public speaking, organizational and personal development, and cross-cultural engagement and border crossing. The curriculum is designed so that each major will spend a minimum of 550 hours in community-based work. These community experiences are integrated through a sustained, developmental curriculum that includes several foundational community engagement courses that introduce and problematize

practice of public narrative and community organizing while tackling a self-selected public project that is grounded in their own values and passions.

As part of the major, students also have two intensive community immersive experiences: a required internship and a yearlong practicum course in which they play a leadership role at local nonprofit organizations. Through the practicum course, students develop skills in areas such as community asset mapping, grant writing, and facilitation. Students in the major are required to take core courses in theology and philosophy focused on “ethical leadership” and “Catholic social thought,” and then they are able to create a “thematic concentration” with three courses focused on self-selected themes such as nonprofit management, education and social change, or environmental justice. Faculty in the department also offer upper-level interdisciplinary courses that enable students to engage in innovative civic learning. For instance, PSP faculty

capstone) which includes vocational explorations and a focus on “careers for the common good,” along with a community-engaged research project.

While the curriculum has continued to develop and evolve over the past almost twenty-five years, several core values undergird the program with a corresponding set of reflective practices, including *democratic education*, *engaged scholarship*, and *reciprocal community partnerships*.

A commitment to democratic education is seen in the role students play as cocreators of learning in the PSP curriculum. Building on the theories of education developed by educational leaders such as Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, and bell hooks, PSP practices a liberatory educational approach that “frees the power” of students to contribute to their education. For instance, upper-level students often coteach the introductory courses with faculty (and community partners) and serve as community liaisons in support of local nonprofits.

Becoming an academic department has allowed PSP to integrate engagement into the reward systems of faculty, most especially with our tenure and promotion guidelines. Originally written in 2008 and revised in 2017, the Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion in Public and Community Service Studies sets “engaged scholarship” as the expectation for faculty members, which includes the praxis of engaged research, engaged pedagogy, and community engagement.

Finally, the program in collaboration with the Feinstein Institute has built a series of reciprocal community partnerships over several decades. Core partnerships have been developed with a range of nonprofit organizations and leaders that include not only students and faculty accompanying communities in their work off campus, but also community partners being offered small stipends to coteach courses in the

## *The program emphasizes self-reflection and humility in order for students to consider their social responsibility in movements to make the world more socially just.*

the concepts of “service,” “community,” “justice,” and “democracy,” along with the history and practice of leadership in nonprofit organizations. These courses also address the convergence of theories, methods, and praxis that allows students to articulate how race, class, gender, and/or sexuality (and other social markers) undergird inequality. Students then take a community organizing course, a class based on an organizing framework developed by Marshall Ganz at Harvard University that enables students to learn the theory and

offer The Community Lens, a community photography course with the art department (see [www.communitylens.org](http://www.communitylens.org)); “The City and...” (i.e., The City and Its Youth, The City and Its Cultures, etc.), a course with a nontraditional college, College Unbound, focused on a rotating theme that engages with the city of Providence; and Philanthropy, a course where students make funding decisions for grants to local nonprofits. The culminating experience for the major is a yearlong capstone (while the minor offers a separate semester-long



department—an embodiment of the value placed on the wisdom of communities.

### SAINT MARY'S JUSTICE, COMMUNITY, AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Justice, Community, and Leadership program (JCL) is only in its fourth year since being revamped from its old Liberal and Civic Studies model. However, we have already built a reputation as a mission-focused, innovative program. In restructuring the program from a breadth of courses in the liberal arts to a program deeply embedded in a democratic education, a commitment to community, and issues of equity, JCL grounds itself in the college's core values of respect for all people, concern for the poor, and social justice. The process for creating JCL was multifold, and included faculty and staff across campus, including the college's Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action (CILSA), the on-campus institute that oversees community engagement. Through yearlong workshops and sub-groups, we explored high-impact practices, surveyed students, and researched other programs with a social justice framework, including Providence College.

JCL has become the second largest major in the School of Liberal Arts and has diversified its student body to more closely resemble the population at Saint Mary's, which is designated as a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). Since its inception, JCL has added three new tenure-track lines and regularly utilizes affiliated faculty across the campus to teach courses. Even with the rapid growth of the program, the faculty are committed to continual renewal, assessment, and student feedback to continue to modify curriculum, create new courses, and develop a culture of care in its program.

In JCL, students learn about histories of oppression, environmental justice, critical theories, global perspectives, ethics,

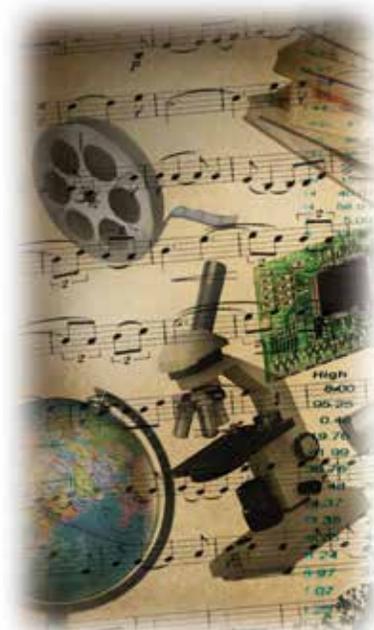
leadership, and education. The program emphasizes self-reflection and humility in order for students to consider their social responsibility in movements to make the world more socially just. Curriculum design has scaffolded learning outcomes in order to build competencies in research, analysis, community engagement, and critical self-reflection.

JCL includes the following learning outcomes:

1. Knowledge—Demonstrate an understanding of engaged pedagogy, critical theory, and social systems as related to justice and leadership studies, and be able to apply theoretical explanations to empirical examples.
2. Research—Use data analysis and interpretation, appropriate library and information literacy skills, and field research to articulate and interpret the complexities of significant social issues.
3. Application—By using leadership studies and critical theory, assess a complex social or community issue and develop multiple viable strategies that contribute to a more just social order.
4. Communication—Effectively use oral, written, and new media formats to educate, advocate, and collaborate with multiple audiences.
5. Reflection—Demonstrate, through written and oral self-assessment and reflection, an understanding of the impact of their own academic learning experience and how it prepares them for a life of active citizenship.

Like the PSP program, the core of the JLC curriculum is the Freirean pedagogy of coeducation, as faculty and students collaborate on creating knowledge in the classroom and taking theory to praxis. Three of its core classes (and several other elective courses) are community engagement (CE) classes in which students work

with community partners in mutually beneficial activities and projects. CE classes are also scaffolded, as students start in the introductory class reading about CE theories and best practices and conduct direct service. Each of the introductory sections has on average three partners from communities throughout the Bay Area. Students continue direct service in an upper-division course, Environmental Justice, by engaging with an on-campus community garden and the Campus Sustainability Committee, as well as an organization in the Bay Area working on relevant issues. In its capstone community engagement class, students work in small groups on a project developed along with a community partner. Students have completed an array of projects, including training videos for parents with special needs kids, resource gap analyses for a local homeless shelter, websites on college-readiness for first-generation students, college day field trips, field trips for elementary students on environmental education, institutional histories, and a curriculum for tutoring programs. In





JCL, we have also scaffolded service with targeted key community partners, so they also have a reliable flow of student workers.

Five years ago, Saint Mary's made completing a community engagement class a requirement for all students. JCL students take a minimum of four CE courses, and most log over one hundred hours by the time they graduate. The JCL program teaches 25 percent of all CE courses on campus, providing the expertise and experiences to provide high-impact practices that benefit the community and the students.

JCL has a three-part capstone experience. In addition to the CE capstone, students have a thesis capstone in which they conduct original research and a self-reflection capstone that requires students to create an eportfolio of their work at Saint Mary's, reflecting on their growth and ways they will live out their education in their personal and professional lives. As part of the eportfolio, they also create a resume that addresses the intensive experience they have working in communities, and they also conduct mock job interviews so they are able to explain how this kind of learning has created a meaningful and desired skill set. JCL students grapple with the complexities of policies, laws, and cultural practices that disadvantage some groups of people while benefiting others. Students in JCL go on to work in diverse fields such as education, nonprofits, law, social entrepreneurship, government, public health, community organizing, and business—yet they share a common framework of critical pedagogies and aim to make the world more socially just.

This kind of comprehensive, whole-person approach to education creates exciting opportunities for transformation. At the same time, the focus on oppression—racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and xenophobia (to name but a few)—requires authentic and

constant attention to class culture in order to enable the spaces of discomfort that promote dialogue, as well as to build connections with the community. This holistic, reciprocal dynamic requires faculty and students to build trust and be responsive to issues as they arise. It also requires a great deal of relational and social-emotional work from the faculty. While it is a labor of love, the department also works to develop opportunities for renewal, whether through informal collegial events or supporting colleagues in maintaining work/life balance. This work cannot be done in a silo, but must be always in community and solidarity.

### DEMOCRATIC PROMISE IN THE CIVIC WORK OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Providence College and Saint Mary's have both developed programs that are committed to civic engagement and social justice, grounded in their Catholic missions. Values-based institutions have a unique ability to declare a position in ways that make education a profoundly political act. But other types of institutions have similar opportunities to draw upon their unique missions to promote the public good through academic programs. At a time when (1) the liberal arts are under attack, (2) higher education faces challenges in responding to the demands of the twenty-first century, and (3) our nation and world confront another wave of nationalism that threatens democracy, it is imperative that higher education institutions provide support for pathways that are innovative, responsive, and relevant. This means developing academic programs that challenge students to think and act as socially responsible citizens.

Based on our experiences leading programs at Providence College and Saint Mary's, we think a few things are essential to support this work. Specifically, colleges and universities need to

- support a new paradigm of education that is collaborative and interdisciplinary;
- invest in the infrastructure and professional development necessary for community-engaged pedagogies;
- create opportunities to learn from and integrate lessons from other programs and high-impact practices;
- involve students as coeducators and coproducers of knowledge;
- recognize that the most powerful learning goes beyond texts and involves real-world problem solving; and
- take risks and be open to change.

Ultimately, we see our work at Providence College and Saint Mary's as connected to a much larger public mission. And these lessons are vital to this purpose. Our academic programs developed not only as a response to student demands or institutional needs, but as responses to the adaptive challenges we confront in today's world. At a time of growing inequality and uncertainty and crisis in our democracy, and with higher education often shrinking from its social responsibility, we hope our efforts illustrate how colleges and universities can be at the forefront of change through the design of academic programs with deeply integrated civic missions. ■

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# The Next “Evolution” of Civic Learning

► **Tania D. Mitchell**, Associate Professor of Higher Education, University of Minnesota

Civic learning and democratic engagement are near ubiquitous in higher education, with postsecondary institutions embracing their responsibility to prepare students for active and informed participation in their communities. This work, aimed at civic renewal, seeks to develop graduates who will do their part to ensure a robust democracy.

Scholars and practitioners have spent much of the last thirty years outlining best practices and identifying the outcomes that result when these practices are implemented. Civic learning initiatives have been shown to yield higher grade point averages, a greater acceptance of diversity, and a desire to contribute to the common good. And while we have seen an expansion of programs, opportunities, and experiences in colleges and universities that promote civic learning and democratic engagement, data from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey still shows that nearly 45 percent of the college students responding to the survey (N = 19,728) report spending zero hours contributing to the community.

Despite its pervasiveness, there is still a significant gap in the reach of civic learning initiatives. So, the initiatives profiled in this issue represent an important step in the work to ensure a broader reach and a deeper connection to civic learning and demonstrate that civic opportunities and motivations exist across our institutions.

Civic learning and democratic engagement are multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary—allowing for these initiatives to thrive in multiple spaces on our campuses. Centering this work within departments and academic units allows faculty to embrace the civic dimensions of their disciplines. It creates linkages between civic learning and civic professions—supporting students in understanding how they might contribute to the public good through occupations connected to their academic studies. It also generates ongoing opportunities for students and instructors to engage in dialogues that might emerge, persist, and evolve as they encounter each other in classes throughout their academic careers.

And while this deepening of civic learning through academic departments and majors ensures that students will be challenged to reflect on the civic possibilities for their lives as college students and after, it does not yet ensure that our improved civic opportunities on campus yield civic benefits beyond our institutional walls. We know our students will benefit, but what will it mean for the communities where this work most often happens?

Civic learning initiatives should aim not only to support students in understanding their civic responsibility and the civic possibilities for our increasingly diverse democracy, but should also aim to be responsive to the social and community concerns that limit civic engagement. These initiatives

should also work to alleviate those concerns with the recognition that full and inclusive engagement in civic life shapes the robust democracy we seek.

Therefore, as we consider the spaces in our own institutions where these kinds of engaged departments might thrive, let us ensure we are also considering the ways we might engage so that our communities also thrive.

- Are we creating spaces and opportunities to build civic leadership and civic agency in our communities as well as in our student body?
- Do community members believe us when we say we want to help? Why or why not?
- Are our civic efforts responsive to issues identified by community members?
- Do we engage the members of the community most impacted by the issues we are addressing?
- Are the actions we are taking those that communities have asked of us?
- Do community members (co-)lead those efforts?
- Are we acting in ways that truly effect change on those community-identified issues?

It feels important that the next “evolution” of civic learning asks not only how we do this work well in our institutions, but how we ensure these efforts yield the best possible civic outcomes—not just for our students, but also for the communities where this work happens. ■



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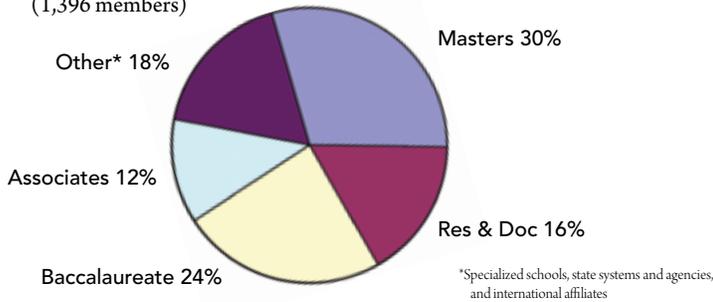
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AAC&U is the leading national association dedicated to advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises 1,400 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Through a broad range of activities, AAC&U reinforces the collective commitment to liberal education at the national, local, and global levels. Its high-quality programs, publications, research, meetings, institutes, public outreach efforts, and campus-based projects help individual institutions ensure that the quality of student learning is central to their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges. Information about AAC&U can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).

### AAC&U Membership 2017

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## 2018 AAC&U NETWORK FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL CONFERENCES

# SAVE THE DATES

**February 15–17, 2018—Philadelphia**

**General Education and Assessment:  
Foundations for Democracy**

### Keynote

**Reimagining General Education: Design Thinking  
and Intrinsic Motivation Perspectives**

Richard K. Miller  
*Olin College of Engineering*

**March 22–24, 2018—San Diego**

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Democracy:  
The Inconvenient Truths**

### Keynote

**We Gon' Be Alright: Diversity, Equity, and  
Resegregation in Higher Education and Beyond**

Jeff Chang  
*Stanford University*

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