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Enhancing the Civic Value of a College Degree: Thoughts on Deepening Practices in Community Engagement

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ENHANCING THE CIVIC VALUE OF A COLLEGE DEGREE

Thoughts on Deepening Practices in Community Engagement
Civic Engagement “Story”

- Maine Campus Compact—and national—history ➔ 30th anniversary next yr.
- Community service ➔ service learning ➔ civic engagement + great expansion and reach ➔ campus/community partnerships
- National calls at turn of the century for increased attention to civic education and engagement
- Responses from higher education
- Frustrations and promising practices moving forward
Why Civic Engagement?

Sense of “Moral Panic” over youth civic disengagement
“In everything I have to do in a school day, the last thing I’m going to care about is politics. That’s just the way I am. I mean, I’d rather go and help a kid read than see what’s going on.”

--College Student, quoted in Millennials Talk Politics (2007)
“Doing service as a college student was such a meaningful experience for me. I hope that my children have the opportunity to work in homeless shelters.”

College senior, quoted in Bernadette Chi, “What is Wrong with This Picture?” (1993)
“Communities have problems; Universities have departments”

--Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace*, 2003
 President’s Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education (1999)

- “[We] commit ourselves...to renew our role as agents of our democracy, [to] catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of higher education”

- “[T]his service is not leading students to embrace the duties of active citizenship and civic participation.”

- Young Americans not prepared to participate fully in our democracy
- Strategies and recommendations for strengthening civic education, particularly K-12
Millennials Talk Politics, 2007

- M’s involved locally with others but ambivalent about politics
- Universities providing very unequal levels of opportunity for civic participation and learning
Inattention to explicitly political engagement outcomes

21 PEP courses and outcomes studied

Findings about teaching strategies that foster political development in students
Education for Democratic Citizenship: A National Call to Action—A Crucible Moment (2012)
A Crucible Moment: “Stalled Movement” for Civic Engagement in Higher Education

- “the epistemology of the academy runs counter to the civic engagement agenda”
- “sense of drift and stalled momentum”
- “imprecise and even conflicting language”
- “highly fragmented and compartmentalized” set of networks
- a “remarkably apolitical” civic agenda
- Framework for 21st Century Civic Learning
Back to Campus Compact “Story”

Community Service ➔
Service learning (institutionalization) ➔
Civic (political) Engagement ➔
Community Engagement (partnerships)
Do Names, Language Matter?

- “Service”
- “Engagement”
- “Partnership”
Disappointment with the Field: A mile wide and an inch deep

- **The Problem of Time**: Most higher education “interventions” are one-course, one-semester.
- **The Problem of [Democratic] Values**: Most programs are “thin” in their conceptual notions of civic engagement and democracy.
- **The Problem of Accountability**: Inadequate attention to what graduates should think & be prepared to do concerning civic action/identity.
Addressing Problems

- The Problem of Time ➔ Sustained, Developmental Programs
- The Problem of [Democratic] Values ➔ Concise Articulation of Core Outcomes (critical reflection, voice, partnerships)
- The Problem of Accountability ➔ Longitudinal studies of alumni/ae, community impact
Best Practices in Civic Engagement: Beyond “One and Done” Initiatives

- Sustained, Developmental, Cohort-based Curricular Programs
- “Engaged Departments”
- Student Voice and Leadership: Students as Colleagues
Sustained, Developmental Civic Engagement Programs

- Public and Community Service Studies major and minor at Providence College
- Other examples (Mitchell, et al., 2011)
- Critical Reflective Practice central to all

- Problems: depth, but not breadth; not accessible to many students; market-driven barriers to success, expansion
The “Engaged Department”

- Connects civic identity to disciplinary or pre-professional identity in a program
- Integration of civic themes, skills, values over time
- Links individual work of faculty to collective work of department

- Problems: fairly thin civic connections or integration developmentally throughout dept. curriculum; critical reflection on civic elements often missing
Student Voice: Students as Colleagues

- Civic identity and action connected to everyday life on campus, in classroom
- Breadth and Depth: can work across campus, connect to curricular/co-curricular leadership development
- Consistent with history of community engagement movement in higher education (catalyzed by students)

- Problems: curricular connections often weak; resistance; institutionalization puts a “pin on the butterfly”
Addressing Problems

- The Problem of Time ➔ Sustained, Developmental Programs
- The Problem of [Democratic] Values ➔ Concise Articulation of Core Outcomes (critical reflection, voice, partnerships)
- The Problem of Accountability ➔ Longitudinal studies of alumni/ae, community impact
What do we mean by “Civic Engagement?”

How do (have we) in higher education define civic engagement?
“A Framework for 21st Century Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement” (Crucible Moment)

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Values
- Collective Action
Civic Identity

Civic Identity is

1) commitment to “community work”
2) an act of “cognitive complexity” requiring more developed thinking
3) “a holistic practice which integrates critical thinking and the capacity for empathy,” and
4) “a deliberately chosen and repeatedly enacted aspect of the self”
5) the key link of MOTIVATION, between knowledge, skills, values, and ACTION

Source: Knefelkamp (2008)
A “sense of oneself as a politically engaged and socially concerned person,” one who “has an overarching commitment to political participation”

“Values, ideals, and commitments that relate to democratic participation are central to one’s self”

Political identity “is a key mediator between an individual’s civic or political values and their behavior” (Colby, et al., 2007: 141-142)
Civic Action/“Active Citizenship” (UK)

“Active Citizenship” (UK):

- **Awareness** of public issues
- **Desire** to address issues
- **Ability** to make judgments & decisions
- **Taking** peaceful direct public action
- **Combining with others** to address issues
- **Reflecting** upon actions and decisions
Partnership Rubric (from RICC PFS)

- Collaborative Relationships
- Mutually Beneficial Outcomes
- Communication & Learning
- Responsiveness to Community Needs
- Improvement of Partnership Practice
Addressing Problems

- The Problem of Time ➔
  Sustained, Developmental Programs

- The Problem of [Democratic] Values ➔
  Concise Articulation of Core Outcomes
  (critical reflection, voice, partnerships)

- The Problem of Accountability ➔
  Longitudinal studies of alumni/ae, community impact
References

- RI Campus Compact. Partnerships for Success Partnership Rubric. 2014
- UK national curriculum in Active Citizenship: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/citizenship
Thank You!

Questions?
Comments?