AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR CIVIC LIFE

A GUIDE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

AN OUR COMMON PURPOSE PUBLICATION

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AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES
Cambridge, Massachusetts

OUR COMMON PURPOSE

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Please direct inquiries to:
American Academy of Arts and Sciences
136 Irving Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138-1996
Telephone: (617) 576-5000
Email: aaas@amacad.org
Visit our website at www.amacad.org

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT of the American Academy

September 2025

The crisis of American democracy has reached the nation's higher education institutions. In the current moment, institutions of higher learning are the subject of heated debates: funding for research, including ongoing scientific and medical projects; the taxing of endowments; the disbursement and repayment of financial aid; the representation of race in curricula and hiring; larger equity-based initiatives often known as DEI; the enrollment and protection of immigrant and foreign students; the right to protest; the right to learn in an environment free of harassment; the institutional freedom to decide whom to admit, as well as the academic freedom to decide what, when, where, and how to teach. Colleges and universities are the epicenter of debates over political independence and the place of expertise in American life.

The last two years have been particularly fraught. Since October 2023, institutions of higher learning have also been the epicenter of the national debate over the American response to the war in Gaza, with protests, counterprotests, and disputes over institutional responses roiling university life. They have seen an acceleration in the use of artificial intelligence in everyday learning environments, bringing to the fore fundamental questions about how education must proceed. Since March 2020, they have been coping with the learning deficits that inevitably accompanied the educational hiatuses that COVID introduced.

Unprecedented pandemics and global events aside, this is not a new situation. One former national security adviser wrote, "The turbulence of the American university today has so many causes and needs so many cures. . . . War, race, revolution, reaction, numbers, money and lack of money, meaning and lack of meaning."[1] He wrote that before the White House began its attacks on funding for universities. In fact, he wrote it well before the outbreak of the war in Gaza. The advisor in question was McGeorge Bundy, and he was writing in 1970.

Bundy's essay appeared in an issue of *Dædalus*, the American Academy's quarterly journal. Fifty-five years ago, the editors of *Dædalus* saw fit to devote two issues to the role of colleges and universities in a democratic society. The titles of these issues speak to the challenges of the era: "The Embattled University" and "Rights and Responsibilities: The University's Dilemma." These issues came in response to crises that in many ways resemble those facing higher education today, including protests over foreign wars, debates over civil rights, legal and cultural challenges around freedom

of speech, and the expansion of executive power. "We are experiencing . . . a crisis involving our political and educational institutions," editor Stephen Richards Graubard wrote in the introduction to the first issue. "Political authority is suspect; so, also, is academic authority. . . . For the universities of the country, the crisis . . . involves delicate issues about the university's responsibility to society."[2]

These issues remain as bracing today as they were in the 1970s. Of particular importance is the responsibility of higher education not just to society as a whole but specifically to democracy. Colleges and universities are among the few institutions explicitly tasked with cultivating critical thinking and civic knowledge, both of which are essential for a thriving democracy. However, this responsibility has placed higher education in an embattled position. Institutions are accused of being at once too partisan and too indifferent. Too permissive and too quick to silence criticism. Too hierarchical and too responsive to student demands. The moment calls for an examination of how higher education can commit to its democratic mission: to prepare students for the obligations and uncertainties of democratic life.

In 2022, the Academy convened a working group to conduct such an examination. Composed of faculty members and university leaders from a range of institutions, the group deliberated on how higher education institutions can accomplish two goals: educate students about how democracy works and foster the civic skills, habits, and dispositions that will prepare students for life in a democratic society. This working group emerged out of the Academy's ongoing effort to revitalize American democracy, based on *Our Common Purpose*, the 2020 report by the Academy's Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship.[3]

I joined the working group as an elected member of the Academy and, at the time, the president of Middlebury College. The importance of this effort became magnified over the course of our convenings. When I assumed the presidency of the Academy in January 2025, it was clear that the organization could fill a need for higher education leaders to offer ideas about how to meet the present moment—a moment of change and challenges. The group met over the course of 2023, and in 2024, members prepared the materials that constitute this publication: an essay on higher education and democracy from the working group leaders; eight strategies for campuses to more fully embrace the work of bolstering democracy; and case studies of institutions already engaged in these efforts.

To be sure, in 2025, institutions everywhere are beginning to embrace the urgency of the moment. Most leaders understand preparation for democratic citizenship to be central to the *durable skills* that make their students employable in both the public and private sectors. Previously called "soft skills," durable skills are those long-term, lasting skills such as creativity, communication, critical thinking, and resilience. Durable skills can future-proof a student's career, as the technical skills they learn as first-year students may be outdated by the time they graduate. Employers are demanding such skills at a higher rate than any sector-specific training.

In our work over the past three years, we witnessed a surge in focus on civic learning. Many campuses now sponsor centers on civic learning or initiatives on civic life. These go beyond voter registration drives, treating civic learning as central to employability and well-roundedness. The

skills necessary to participate in a democracy are indeed durable, requiring the application of a sound knowledge base, adaptability to the needs of the community, working across the aisle with those whose opinions differ radically from one's own, resilience in the face of failure, and faithfulness to a larger vision.

We also learned that just having a center for civics is not enough. In the following pages, we describe campus practices that make civic learning itself durable, or, as I often like to say, "make democracy concrete." In an age when democracy can often feel like an abstraction and democratic participation a burdensome chore, these practices make the knowledge and skills of civic learning real and relevant. I hope that these case studies—culled not only from across the higher education sector but from across the United States—also serve as recommendations for action. They can act as blueprints for how higher education can help democracy last.

Special thanks to Ben Vinson III and David E. Campbell, both members of the commission that produced *Our Common Purpose*, for leading the Working Group on Building Democratic Citizens in Higher Education, as well as the members of that group, many of whom contributed case studies. Thank you to the cochairs of the Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship—Danielle Allen of Harvard University, Eric Liu of Citizen University, and Stephen Heintz of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund—as well as my predecessor David Oxtoby for their vision and leadership. And thank you to my Academy colleagues who staffed the working group and contributed to this publication: Phyllis Bendell, Jonathan Cohen, Zachey Kliger, Scott Raymond, Betsy Super, and Peter Walton; as well as Abhishek Raman, who previously facilitated the working group meetings.

Finally, my gratitude to the individuals and foundations who make it possible for the Academy to continue its work on American democracy: the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Clary Family Charitable Fund, Alan and Lauren Dachs, Sara Lee Schupf and the Lubin Family Foundation, Joan and Irwin Jacobs, David M. Rubenstein, and Patti Saris.

"The university, which has for so long served as a prime agency for the study of other institutions, must now turn to a more serious study of itself," *Dædalus* editor Stephen Richards Graubard argued in 1970. Today's institutions of higher education should likewise examine their responsibility to society and commit themselves to the cause of improving civic life. By doing so, Graubard concluded, the university can "contribute to its own survival as a free institution, and in the process contribute to the survival of a democratic and humane America."[4]

In 2025, even as we translate it into a new idiom for our time, this remains the work we must do to make democracy concrete.

Laurie L. Patton
Cambridge, MA

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION in Constitutional Democracy

David E. Campbell and Ben Vinson III

A major trend that has defined American life over the last few decades is declining trust in institutions. Few institutions have been spared, from the military and the medical system to corporations and Congress. Partisanship explains some, but not all, of this trend. Overall, Americans from both parties—and those without political affiliations—have lost faith that major entities work well, work for them, or work at all.

Few sectors have been as affected by the rising tide of distrust as higher education. In 2015, 57 percent of Americans expressed a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education, according to a Gallup poll. By 2025, Gallup recorded a 15 percent decline—primarily due to a plunge in faith among Republicans.[5] As recently as 2010, 58 percent of Republicans said colleges and universities were having a positive impact on American progress. In 2024, only 31 percent thought so.[6] However, for higher education, too, partisanship is only part of the story, with a 16 percent decline in confidence among independents and a 9 percent decline among Democrats from 2015 to 2023. Over the last two years, the responses to the campus protests over the war in Gaza and debates over diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming and campus curricula have almost certainly deepened some Americans' distrust of higher education.

The overall decline of trust in institutions is one of the major challenges facing American democracy. Constitutional democracies rely on trust, people's faith in a common purpose, and a willingness to compromise. Today, that common purpose is increasingly hard to come by. One result is calcified institutions whose inaction or unresponsiveness spurs a loss of confidence among the public, which further weakens institutions, which weakens trust even more, and so on. Such trends are particularly worrying for young people. Growing up in a time of democratic crisis, they are not being provided with the evidence of democratic effectiveness needed to make them the nation's future engaged leaders. Across the globe, young people exhibit less faith in democratic institutions than any other age group.[7] In the United States, less than one-quarter of people aged eighteen to forty say they trust the federal government, only 29 percent trust their local government, and just 54 percent feel democracy has potential as an effective form of government.[8] A 2024 poll found 83 percent of people aged eighteen to thirty-four were at least somewhat worried about the state of American democracy.[9]

The work of repairing American democracy and American trust will require a wide range of institutions. Higher education institutions

have a particular responsibility to help reverse these trends. The first colleges and universities in North America predate the founding of the country, and, since those early years, education has played an essential role in cultivating participation in the body politic. From the start, these institutions trained emerging leaders, free thinkers, and politically mature social actors. Leaders of American academia recognized the importance of instilling a holistic perspective that prepares a whole person for a whole life. These are necessary building blocks for effective citizens and, by extension, an effective democracy.

Today, colleges and universities in America are particularly suited to be sites of democratic renewal. Higher education institutions have profound convening power. They can assemble powerful internal and external constituencies to devise solutions to critical issues. At the same time, they remain sites of inquiry that produce technological advancements and artistic masterpieces. And they have the unique ability to tie together the work of research, instruction, and dissemination in ways that reach broadly outward into communities, industry, and government. In essence, colleges and universities prepare many of the raw ingredients that are core to a healthy democracy.

Much of the work of democratic renewal currently underway on campuses is siloed and segmented. Many campuses have faculty members or deans who are passionate about cultivating democratic values. Many even have campus centers or institutes devoted to democracy or citizenship. But at too many institutions, these efforts are cordoned off, just one of many initiatives that make campuses such interesting, diverse places. When democracy work is confined to certain parts of campus, it reaches only certain segments of the campus community, notably those already interested in democracy who seek out ways to become better citizens.[10]

Since October 2023, universities have been at the epicenter of the national debate over the American response to the war in Gaza.

For colleges and universities to fulfill their duty to American democracy, they must build the commitment and capacity to develop democratic citizens.[11] Specifically, colleges and universities need to *embed democratic values throughout institutional culture and curriculum*. Every part of campus would benefit from embracing democratic norms, and every part of campus life, from the laboratory to the sports field, offers an opportunity to instill democratic values. The work of cultivating a sense of community can be baked into the institution such that students engage intentionally in the work of democracy while also encountering it organically across campus.

When embedding democratic citizenship throughout their institutions, colleges and universities should have two specific goals. The first is to graduate *civically knowledgeable* students. Students should leave higher education more knowledgeable about how their democracy works, their individual role in American democracy, and how they can engage with their democracy and help make it better. Higher education also needs to furnish students with *civic skills*: namely, the ability to have difficult conversations, to talk with people with whom they disagree, about politics or anything else. These skills do not come naturally, and the American public sorely needs them. Colleges can ensure new generations of voters, leaders, and activists matriculate into adulthood equipped with the ability to help repair institutions and to lower the temperature of political discord. After all, a citizenry that is both informed, engaged, and able to deal with difference is the prerequisite of a healthy constitutional democracy.

We do not mean to suggest that some institutions are not already taking their responsibility to democracy seriously and working to build the kinds of citizens America will need in the future. This report offers case studies highlighting just a few of these efforts. But more institutions can engage in this kind of work, and many of the institutions that already are engaged can do even more. Some may be hesitant to do so. Recent challenges to higher education only magnify the need for campus cultures in which citizen engagement *and* respectful dialogue are the norm. And by teaching students in a nonpartisan way about the fundamentals of democracy, and by making campuses more open to a wider range of freely expressed political opinions, institutions can begin to restore Americans' faith in higher education's positive contributions to the country.

The charge for a whole-campus commitment to democratic citizenship emerged from a working group of higher education leaders convened by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (see the Appendix for a list of working group members). This effort emerged out of the Academy's work on American democracy, building on its landmark cross-partisan report *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century*.[12] The report offers thirty-one recommendations to strengthen democratic institutions, repair American civic culture, and bolster civil society. None of the recommendations, though, specifically explains how higher education institutions can and should engage in the work of reinventing democracy. The working group was convened to do just that.

Through its deliberations, the working group helped develop eight strategies for moving institutions toward a campus-wide commitment to democracy (the strategies are listed in the next section).

The strategies are purposefully ambitious. Higher education leaders are uniquely positioned to make major changes at their institutions. In no uncertain terms, university presidents and senior leaders set the tone for their campuses. What they value, how they interact with others, and what topics they choose to discuss in public establish a shared set of values for the university community. They can model a democratic-focused culture and deliberative dialogue. At the same time, they can use their administrative authority to ensure all parts of campus take part in this work. If institutions have a unique role and responsibility to democracy, institutional leaders have a unique role and responsibility to set the tone for their campuses' embrace of democratic values.

To supplement the strategies, some members of our working group prepared case studies highlighting specific institutions already engaging in the work of infusing democratic citizenship into their bloodstream. We recognize, of course, that every campus is different. What works at the University of Miami will not necessarily work at Miami University. So while the case studies reflect the circumstances of the campus in question, they also represent the kinds of initiatives leaders could pursue for their own campuses, even if they do so in different ways.

These are unprecedented times, and higher education is facing unprecedented challenges. The case studies that follow offer at least some precedent for how campuses are rising to meet the moment.

By renewing their commitment to democratic values, institutions of higher education will benefit more than just their students. Within their local communities, colleges and universities are hubs of democratic activity. And nationwide, they can model strategies to overcome polarization, foster healthy discourse, and seek constructive ways to sustain America as a democratic republic. Americans can learn to trust again. Colleges and universities should help show them how.

Colleges and universities should seek to foster student civic engagement beyond election years.

STRATEGIES FOR EMBEDDING THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP Throughout Institutional Culture and Curriculum

1. Facilitate cross-campus collaboration on democratic engagement.
2. Foster student civic engagement beyond election years.
3. Engage every major with civics.
4. Empower faculty to cultivate civic skills and incorporate civic knowledge into their curricula.
5. Foster skills in discussion and listening.
6. Articulate the value of democratic engagement for students and parents.
7. Engage local communities to create opportunities for the practice of democratic citizenship.
8. Identify key performance indicators to measure political learning.

1. Facilitate cross-campus collaboration on democratic engagement.

The work of instilling democratic values across a higher education institution should not be assigned to a single department, office, or student group. After all, student leaders graduate, administrators leave, and funding can dry up. Instead, campus leaders should aspire to cultivate a *culture* of democratic participation that will enable larger structural change. To build this culture, campus leaders need to promote collaborative efforts that touch all parts of university life.

One place to begin this effort is by making democratic citizenship explicit in the institution's mission statement and across curricula, extracurricular programming, and faculty-development efforts. Leaders should identify a broad coalition of campus stakeholders already eager to do this work and deputize them to spearhead specific efforts. President's offices can serve as central hubs for distinct democratic workstreams. University leaders can leverage their unique bird's-eye view of campus—as well as their discretionary funding and cross-campus convening and communications power—to ensure collaboration between prodemocracy efforts.

See Trevor Brown, "Leveraging Mission and Traditions to Prepare Democratic Citizens," case study from The Ohio State University, on page 13.

Ohio State University Chase Center hosts a conversation on citizenship with university leaders, March 27, 2025.

2. Foster student civic engagement beyond election years.

Voting represents just one of many ways students can exercise civic skills and civic knowledge. Voter turnout should be considered the floor, not the ceiling, of democratic engagement on campus.

To foster sustained civic engagement, campuses need to facilitate civic opportunities for students. Schools should make it as easy as possible for students to engage with local government, to learn more about decisions that affect them personally, and to build connections with others who are passionate about similar issues. These efforts can be accomplished by, for example, bringing lawmakers to campus or offering students paid opportunities to get involved. Students live busy lives, and university leaders can reduce barriers standing between young people and a more active democratic engagement, especially during nonelection years.

See Josh Blakely, "Making a Whole-Campus Commitment to Citizenship," case study from Longwood University, on page 11.

3. Engage every major with civics.

Students' ability to select their own areas of study presents a potential challenge for an institution seeking to instill democratic values. Some students, after all, may—even unintentionally—avoid courses focused on civic knowledge or avoid departments in which civic skills are a key part of how classrooms are managed. According to data from Tufts University's National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, students that major in STEM fields historically have lower rates of democratic engagement, including voter turnout.[13]

It does not have to be this way. A whole-campus commitment to democracy means creating opportunities for every classroom to

instill civics in a subject-matter-relevant and nonpartisan way—even in classes focused on topics that, on the surface, are not connected to democracy. One step institutions can take to improve civic participation among all majors is to establish civics courses as part of the required curriculum. Civics can also be incorporated into existing course material across a wide range of fields. To further engage STEM majors, campuses can provide programming that connects democratic participation to issues these students are passionate about.

See Josiah Ober, "Civics and Campus Life," case study from Stanford University, on page 16.

4. Empower faculty to cultivate civic skills and incorporate civic knowledge into their curricula.

Every classroom should embody the principles of free expression, open inquiry, and civil disagreement. Faculty members, particularly in fields that may seem distant from democratic issues, have a unique opportunity to bolster students' civic knowledge and civic skills. However, faculty may be loath to take up such programming on their own. Faculty are fearful of slipping into partisanship or igniting controversy. Many faculty members see their role as limited to their specific subject. Or they may simply feel that they lack the expertise to facilitate conversations about civic topics. Institutions' cross-campus collaborative efforts on democracy would provide the justification and the impetus for professors to incorporate civic knowledge into their course materials.

Even more important, university leaders need to arrange pedagogical training for faculty. These trainings should emphasize the disposition of curiosity and should help faculty become more comfortable raising—and soliciting—both unpopular opinions and conversations related to democratic life. Institutions should have a comprehensive centralized resource for training faculty in this area.

Students deliberate on citizenship and the issues citizens face in their communities on Symposium Day, the capstone of Longwood University's Civitae Core Curriculum.

See Sarah Surak, "Teaching Faculty How to Incorporate Civic Engagement into Their Curricula," case study from Salisbury University, on page 18.

5. Foster skills in discussion and listening.

Americans need to get better at talking to one another. Young people—and college students—are no exception. One-third of college students are uncomfortable sharing their political views on campus, according to an Institute of Politics study, while a study by the Constructive Dialogue Institute and More in Common found 45 percent of students, and 64 percent of very conservative students, regularly hold back opinions to avoid upsetting their peers.[14] If students self-censor, they impoverish their education and leave themselves—and their peers—unprepared for a political system that depends on give-and-take.

In response to increasing polarization and division, institutions of higher education must do more to encourage engagement with a broad diversity of viewpoints. They also need to build students' competencies in civil discourse, constructive debate, and mutual understanding. Such competencies cannot be taken for granted. Students need to learn how to listen to one another, make evidence-based arguments, and discuss hard issues. Learning to do so in the classroom will help them have these conversations in their dorms, dining halls, and other parts of campus. Universities should ensure that students have access to spaces where they are exposed to divergent viewpoints, where they can learn to respect those perspectives, and where they can come to recognize the value of compromise.

See Brian Dille and Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo, "Workforce Development and Civic Education," case study from Maricopa County Community College District, on page 15.

In response to increasing polarization, campuses should encourage students to engage with a broad diversity of viewpoints.

6. Articulate the value of democratic engagement for students and parents.

An education that prioritizes democratic participation does not just serve society at large. Students themselves benefit in the form of improved life satisfaction, stronger relationships, and better job opportunities. However, such benefits are not necessarily self-evident. Many students attend college on the expectation that what they learn will help them in their career. Many parents send their children to college expecting that their degree will provide a boost in the labor market. Leaders should make a point of articulating what students gain when they learn how to embody democratic values. Conversely, understanding the ways business and private enterprise rely on democratic governance and the rule of law will better equip students to understand both constitutional democracy *and* any future professional pursuits. Regardless of professional field, employers want workers who know how to listen, can think critically, and can empathize with different viewpoints. Explaining these facts at the outset will motivate students to prioritize developing civic skills and civic knowledge.

See Brian Dille and Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo, "Workforce Development and Civic Education," case study from Maricopa County Community College District, on page 15.

7. Engage local communities to create opportunities for the practice of democratic citizenship.

Research has shown that participating in one's community and working with others on an issue has a lasting impact, including improved social-emotional well-being.[15] If students build muscles of involvement with democratic practice when they are young, they may be more inclined to engage in these efforts as they mature. Institutions, then, should provide opportunities for students to improve both their knowledge of local government and their direct engagement with it.

See Marianne Wanamaker, "How Higher Education Institutions Can Engage Students with Local Government," case study from University of Tennessee, Knoxville, on page 20.

8. Identify key performance indicators to measure political learning.

Making a whole-campus commitment to democracy is one thing. Measuring that commitment and gathering data on the effectiveness of that commitment represent additional challenges. Ideally, institutions should measure two trends. First, they should assess the degree to which their campuses encourage students to be responsible citizens. How many academic departments or courses have incorporated civics into their curricula? How many on-campus bodies have hosted democracy-adjacent programming? What extracurricular opportunities are available that help students get involved with their local community? Second, institutions should measure students' engagement with these efforts by tracking course enrollment, extracurricular participation, and improvements in students' civic knowledge and civic skills.

Capturing metrics such as these is always difficult. University leaders can draw inspiration from an initiative of the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE), a nonpartisan applied research and resource center housed

within the American Association of Colleges and Universities. Over the past decade, IDHE has completed twenty-five qualitative campus climate studies to examine the attributes of highly politically engaged campuses. These campuses were "outliers" in the sense that their aggregate (institutional) student voting rate was significantly higher (and, in a few cases, significantly lower) than IDHE predicted based on a statistical model they created. Four of the twenty-five campuses were selected because they had closed equity gaps in voting, based on IDHE's statistical modeling.[16]

Based on this research, IDHE found that students learn about democracy primarily through the campus climate for political learning and participation, rather than from any single program or department. IDHE identified a few important questions to evaluate through focus groups, surveys, and other mechanisms, all of which represent the kinds of institutional norms, symbols, structures, and behaviors university leaders should endeavor to measure on their campuses:[17] Are skilled political discussions pervasive across campus? Are students educated to become leaders, community organizers, activists, and agents of social change? During elections, do campuses not only remove barriers to student voting but turn the election season into opportunities to learn about democracy and their responsibilities in a governing system "of, by, and for" the people? Finally, how pervasive are norms of caring and of shared responsibility across the campus community?

Of course, focus groups represent just one of many approaches to gathering data on democratic engagement. Campuses could consider conducting a civic assessment survey for first-year students and then readministering the survey when students graduate.[18] Importantly, individual institutions need not create a new measurement tool from scratch. Existing options like the Institute for Citizens and Scholars' civic readiness map offer ready-made measurements available for higher education leaders.[19]

AAC&U's Institute for Democracy & Higher Education prefers discussion for assessment and change initiatives, sometimes hiring artists to capture concepts and themes.

Making a Whole-Campus Commitment to Citizenship: Longwood University

Josh Blakely

What does it look like for a higher education institution to make a whole-campus commitment to democratic values? Perhaps no campus offers a better example than Longwood University, a public four-year institution in Farmville, Virginia. The university embodies how classroom curricula and outside-the-classroom experiences can be leveraged toward cultivating the next generation of civic leaders.

In 1997, Longwood University's board of visitors adopted a new mission, declaring Longwood "dedicated to the development of citizen leaders who are prepared to make positive contributions to the common good of society." Longwood accomplishes this mission through its curriculum, off-campus programming, and robust student-affairs opportunities.

Core Curriculum

Longwood's core curriculum, known as Civitae, is the general education program for all undergraduate students at the university. It begins with a course known as CTZN 110. During this introductory class, students investigate the foundations of citizenship, including ethical reasoning, critical thought, and civil discourse. Their core curriculum experience continues with "Pillar" classes. These disciplinary courses develop students' foundational citizenship skills through the study of world languages and cultures and creative problem-solving using quantitative and scientific reasoning. As students progress through their general education into upper-level courses, they encounter "Perspectives." Faculty in these courses help students develop an informed perspective on a civic issue. In addition, these courses challenge students to locate, evaluate, and organize information from multiple disciplines—a key skill for a modern citizen leader. A student's academic experience reaches its zenith with the capstone course, the Symposium on the Common Good. During this seminar course, students consider citizenship itself and all the issues a citizen faces.

Off-Campus Experiences

To supplement the Civitae classroom learning, Longwood students engage in "Brock Experiences," unique courses in which students explore an unresolved civic issue somewhere in

America. This suite of courses immerses students by taking them to wherever that issue is most salient. One team of students might travel to Yellowstone National Park to consider the stewardship of public lands. Another group might travel to Arizona to consider immigration policy or to San Francisco to consider the future of human genetic engineering. Along the way, everyone on a Brock Experience reflects on contentious issues in their own community and ways to lead for positive change. Faculty and staff lead these academic courses, and significant effort goes into preparing them to do so. For many, the beginning of their training happens at the Chesapeake Bay Institute, a professional development version of one of the Brock Experience student courses. Faculty and staff experience a Brock course in miniature as they learn how to lead this style of class. Some faculty go on to propose new Brock Experiences and are chosen to be part of the Brock Fellowship—a two-year period of intensive professional development that leads to the launch of a new course.

Other Cocurricular Efforts

At Longwood, other campus activities, beyond the Civatae courses and Brock Experiences, are designed to further enhance students' civic learning. Longwood offers many of the same activities as other campuses but suffuses these activities with a throughline of training citizen leaders. Cocurricular activities—collegiate programming outside the classroom—are organized according to a citizen leadership model and are intended to foster civic engagement, reflective and integrative learning, effective communication, professional and life skills development, intercultural engagement, and understanding of self and others. While the campus boasts the requisite student governing bodies and volunteer opportunities, it also features a robust community of secret societies that shape the student body toward such democratic ideals as service to the whole, servant leadership, and the joy of community.

Longwood University is committed to its mission of developing citizen leaders who make positive contributions to the common good.

A robust fraternity and sorority culture is augmented by the university's version of civil society, found in such groups as the Honors Student Association, the Wesley Campus Ministry, and the *Rotunda* student newspaper. Putting into practice what they were taught in the classroom, students from minoritized backgrounds united to form a new advocacy organization focused on making positive changes for nonwhite students. This resulted in campus-wide change and increased representation in university decision-making.

Overall, Longwood University is committed to its mission of developing citizen leaders who make positive contributions to the common good. This is manifest in its curriculum through a focus on civic issues and citizenship skill development, and in cocurricular programs via opportunities for students to put those citizenship skills to work in leading their peers or advocating for change. All these efforts are supported by citizen leaders in the faculty and staff who care deeply about the common good.

Leveraging Mission and Traditions to Prepare Democratic Citizens: The Ohio State University

Trevor Brown

The Ohio State University, a public four-year flagship institution, is illustrative of the power of mission and history to drive a university's efforts to promote democratic citizenship.

Most higher education institutions in the United States are organized to create and disseminate knowledge. While great insights and understanding come from free inquiry, some higher education institutions direct the generation of knowledge toward a societal goal. They are endowed with a mission to prepare students to serve the general welfare and engage in research that solves public problems. Private Jesuit universities, for example, are driven to educate students to live a life beyond the self, helping to care for the impoverished. Similarly, many public institutions—particularly land-grant universities created by the Morrill Act of 1862—are charged to expand access and prepare students to serve their states as workers and citizens.

A deeply rooted mission can serve as the foundation for organizing the university's basic functions, notably teaching, around democratic citizenship. This mission might be embedded in the university's founding charter. Alternatively, a core mission might be born of a transformative leader at a seminal point in history who directed the university's work toward supporting the democratic system. Narratives and stories about past leaders can enliven a founding charter, and university traditions, mottos, and symbols can complement a core commitment to the university's overarching purpose.

Contemporary leaders can utilize historical mission and traditions to focus core university functions on the preparation of democratic citizens. This historic purpose can serve as a counterweight or complement to the increasing pressure to deliver a transactional return on investment for all the university's functions, notably its degree offerings. The artful leader can harness the university's historical mission to focus on the preparation of democratic citizens through more malleable governing and guiding documents and programs, like strategic plans, university policies, and curricula.

The Ohio State University (OSU)

Founded in 1870 with funds from the Morrill Act as the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, OSU initially focused on providing a curriculum in the agricultural, military, and industrial arts. As a land-grant institution, its charge was to expand educational access to the state's residents and offer emerging fields of study aligned with state and national purposes. Ohio governor Rutherford B. Hayes located the new university in the state capital, Columbus, rather than in the state's agricultural regions to ensure balance between

agricultural, industrial, and other interests. Over the university's first decade, Hayes and members of the board of trustees broadened the curriculum to include liberal arts disciplines. In 1878, the university was renamed The Ohio State University to reflect its comprehensive teaching and research agenda. In this first decade of operation, Hayes and his supporters on the board imbued the university with the responsibility to educate the state's sons and daughters to be patriots and citizens in the post–Civil War era. Fast forward to 1952, when university architect Howard D. Smith was tasked with redesigning the university's seal to reflect its founding purpose: Smith added the Latin words *disiciplina in civitatem* (education for citizenship), a phrase that, ever since, has served as the university's motto.

The combination of historical mission and strategic planning has resulted in curricular programs oriented around citizenship.

Recent presidents and provosts have leveraged this founding purpose to further embed education for citizenship into the life of the university. Successive strategic plans (including current President Ted Carter's "Education for Citizenship" strategic plan) have incorporated the motto "education for citizenship" as a focal point for planning and outlined a societal mission:

- creating and discovering knowledge to improve the well-being of local, state, regional, national, and global communities;
- educating students through a comprehensive array of distinguished academic programs;
- preparing a student body reflective of the state and the nation to be leaders and engaged citizens; and
- fostering a culture of engagement and service.

The combination of historical mission and strategic planning has resulted in curricular programs oriented around citizenship. For example, in the fall of 2022, OSU launched a new General Education (GE) program—the first in thirty years—in which all students must take four to six credit hours of courses in citizenship. The university has also created new organizational structures to further embed this commitment. Most notably, in 2015, the board of trustees created the John Glenn College of Public Affairs to pursue a motto coined by Senator Glenn, "to inspire citizenship and develop leadership." More recently, with direction and funding from the Ohio legislature, the university established the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society, charged with offering courses in citizenship grounded in the U.S. Constitution. Finally, research centers and institutes across campus, notably the Civil Discourse Initiative run by the Center for Ethics and Human Values, offer citizenship programming under the banner of "education for citizenship."

These curricular, structural, and programmatic efforts align with the values of the university's founding purpose and enduring motto. Successive leaders working in collaboration with faculty, staff, and students have deepened this commitment to preparing democratic citizens by drawing on the past.

Workforce Development and Civic Education: Maricopa County Community College District

Brian Dille and Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo

Higher education institutions can and should take steps to improve democratic practice on their campuses and for their students. They can also help develop tools and programs that aid democratic life in their surrounding communities. That is what happened in the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), the home of ten colleges in the greater Phoenix area. With a total enrollment of around one hundred thousand students, MCCCD is one of the largest community college systems in the country.

In the spring of 2022, representatives from several civic groups in Arizona met to talk about the growing polarization in the country and in the state. The legislature had authorized a partisan and poorly executed recount of the 2020 election results, and public officials were being harassed and receiving death threats. At the meeting, a member of the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce expressed the concern that, in this volatile setting, conversations at the workplace could go badly and destroy the ability of work teams to function.

While many organizations focus on promoting civic engagement among K–12 and higher-education students, this group in Arizona determined that the problems facing society are rooted more in adult behavior than in student actions. The group felt that adults needed a refresher course on the value of democratic citizenship and on cultivating the skills associated with democratic life. The easiest place to find adults is in the workplace. This led to Creating Community, a workforce-development tool designed for civic groups and industry to inculcate the skills a person needs to succeed in business and society.

The Maricopa County Community College District convened and led a coalition of civic groups to develop three modules. The district provided subject-matter experts from multiple colleges and facilitated the editing and publication of the modules. Each module emphasizes the value of citizenship in a diverse society. The modules are designed to be delivered in person or online. They review the skills needed to function as an engaged citizen and develop the habits of using those skills in public settings, with an emphasis on how to develop consensus. The modules were written in nonacademic terms to enable non-subject-matter experts, such as human resources officers, to facilitate the conversations.

The modules were also informed by a Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement study on perceptions of civic language. Per the study, the module avoids terms that are divisive and promotes terms that reflect shared values. The first module includes a civic engagement "Rosetta Stone" to connect the academic terms for civil discourse to equivalent terms for soft skills in a business context. "Community-based learning" is essentially the

same idea as "public/private partnerships," for example. This reflects efforts to use language that appeals to the widest audience across partisan, demographic, and urban/rural divides.

The Creating Community workforce-development tool has been delivered to a variety of groups in the state. These include parole officers in rural Mohave County and retirement groups in urban Mesa. The Maricopa colleges have also used the modules internally, such as with employees of Maricopa Corporate College who, in turn, are sharing the modules with their contacts in business and industry. The modules are available for download free of charge and in print through a grant from the Vitalyst Health Foundation, a public health philanthropy. Its support was the result of the realization that, if communities lose the ability to have difficult conversations, none of the health problems they work on can be solved. The Creating Community workforce-development tool can be viewed at https://learn.maricopa.edu/courses/1102445.

Civics and Campus Life: Stanford University

Josiah Ober

A higher education civics curriculum should ensure students can do more than simply pass a naturalization exam. In addition to providing a basic grasp of American history and government, it should explain to students why democracy is difficult to get and to keep; how those difficulties have been addressed in the past; and the contemporary challenges to democracy. Stanford University, a four-year institution in Palo Alto, California, has made a whole-campus commitment to this effort, especially through its curriculum.

The Stanford Civics Initiative began informally in 2017 with discussions among a group of Stanford faculty from schools and departments across the university who agreed that Stanford was failing in its historic responsibility to teach the next generation the fundamental knowledge and skills required for effective participation in a constitutional democracy.

The result, in 2018, was the Stanford Civics Initiative (SCI). SCI coordinates teaching on topics related to civics by regular Stanford faculty and senior fellows of the Hoover Institution, a think tank on Stanford's campus. SCI also pays for three postdoctoral teaching fellows who offer two or three courses each year in the areas of political thought, history, and economics. Fellowships are financed by individual donors and foundations and managed by a volunteer faculty committee.

The Initiative has two primary areas of focus. The first is the development and implementation of an introductory course, Citizenship in the 21st Century, for first-year students. Next, and currently in development, is an academic minor in Civic Thought and Practice, to be offered to second- and fourth-year students, as well as an honors program.

In 2020, the Stanford University Senate approved a three-part sequence of courses, dubbed "COLLEGE: Civic, Liberal and Global Education." First-year students are required to take any two of these courses. As a result, in the winter 2025 quarter, around 1,200 of the approximately 1,800 first-year students on campus took Citizenship in the 21st Century. Pending Senate approval, all three courses will soon be mandatory.

The course is taught seminar-style to groups of fifteen students (currently about fifty-three instructors teach around eighty sections), using a common syllabus designed and annually reviewed by a faculty committee (see text box for more about the syllabus). Each seminar meets twice per week. Students read texts that take contrasting positions on inherently difficult, value-laden questions on which students are likely to have diverse views. Class time emphasizes discussion, employing norms of mutually respectful civil discourse, and assignments include responding to discussion questions, annotating readings, a midterm paper, and a final paper.

Instructors who have not taught the course before are offered training sessions conducted by those who helped design the course and taught it during the testing period. Training emphasizes techniques for promoting respectful and vigorous debate on contested questions. Groups of instructors meet weekly throughout the quarter to discuss issues and compare approaches. Detailed notes and reading guides are available to instructors for each module.

Stanford has now offered Citizenship in the 21st Century at full scale for three years—previously, the course was tested with only a small number of sections. Initial results of student evaluations are positive, suggesting it is meeting a real need.

Meanwhile, the minor and honors programs in Civic Thought and Practice are in the planning stages. The goal is to enable Stanford students with a serious interest in civics, regardless of their major, to take a coordinated sequence of advanced courses along several tracks, including constitutionalism and law, political thought, political history, and political economy.

THE SYLLABUS INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND TOPICS:

What is citizenship? Why should we study it? Can citizenship work in a divided society? How can we communicate across differences? How should we study citizenship? Citizenship as cooperation: Thomas Hobbes's challenge and the dangers of free riding. Institutionalizing citizenship: constitutions, norms, and rules. Free speech in divided societies. Technology and citizenship. Race and the contested boundaries of citizenship. Immigration, naturalization, and taking on new forms of citizenship. Citizenship, diversity, and culture. Social class and citizenship. Economic inequality and citizenship. The threat of authoritarianism. Civil disobedience, exit, and revolution. The possibility of global citizenship.

Teaching Faculty How to Incorporate Civic Engagement into Their Curricula: Salisbury University

Sarah Surak

Faculty need access to training to integrate civic engagement into their classrooms, especially in disciplines without an obvious connection to civics. To do so, universities need to ensure faculty are prepared to incorporate civic topics and democratic practice into their curricula in an academically grounded way. Salisbury University, a public four-year institution that is part of the University System of Maryland, has developed the kind of programming necessary to help faculty make democratic practice part of their classroom experience.

Salisbury University prepares faculty to incorporate civics into their classroom through a faculty-development program called Civic Engagement Across the Curriculum (CEAC). Developed in 2014 by the university's Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, CEAC begins from the standpoint that a substantive civic engagement component (approximately 20 percent of course material and assessment) can be adopted into any course. CEAC itself takes various forms, including a ten-week, ninety-minute seminar with six to eight faculty members and a fifteen-hour, online, self-paced module.

The seminar begins by introducing and defining civic engagement—drawing particularly upon the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Elective Classification for Community Engagement. From there, CEAC uses a "discipline-oriented citizenship" conceptual framework to support civic education across disciplines. The framework assumes that faculty members are experts in their own disciplines and thus will be the ones best suited to see how civics might fit into their coursework.

CEAC invites faculty to consider a few key questions:

- How does your discipline characterize ways of knowing and forms of inquiry?
- How does your field contribute to society, and what are the responsibilities of practitioners in your discipline toward society?
- How do members of your discipline interact with individuals and communities on local, national, and/or international levels?
- What skills can your discipline leverage toward examining social issues?
- What knowledge in your discipline comes from the community?

A discipline-orientated citizenship approach to civic engagement in the classroom stresses three elements: grounding the design of civic engagement activities within the academic discipline, fostering reciprocal relationships with partners in the community, and providing students with mechanisms to demonstrate the knowledge needed to engage their community. Without this three-part grounding,

Surveys show that, after seminar participation, faculty are likely to incorporate elements of civic engagement in a variety of courses, even those without a specific "civic engagement assignment," accounting for 20–30 percent of the course grade.

course activities (for example, volunteering to pick up litter in a park) might benefit a community without necessarily enhancing the course's discipline-based learning objectives. Rather than provide a list of examples that may not fit a course's learning objectives, CEAC facilitators encourage participants to find examples of engagement within their fields and subfields.

In addition to introducing community-engaged teaching, CEAC also presents theoretical frameworks for civic education, such as ecological systems theory, situated learning theory, and action civics. These theories of education provide faculty a basis for best practices in the conveyance of knowledge in teaching and learning. From this base, faculty work to revise an existing syllabus or design a new course. The goal is to leave the seminar with a syllabus that includes project-related readings, assignment guidelines, and reflection and assessment mechanisms.

Another strategy CEAC encourages for developing syllabi is backward design: identifying a course's intended outcomes and designing it backward from those outcomes. This process helps faculty embed civic components throughout the semester (rather than relegating them to a single stand-alone module) and ensures civic materials align with course objectives.

To date, faculty from across Salisbury University have participated in CEAC. A few examples of civic engagement projects include:

- a finance class assessing a local food assistance program and presenting results at a community forum to increase understanding of the barriers to access;
- a geography class collaborating with community groups to evaluate local water issues;
- an environmental studies class surveying the community to support the implementation of a city sustainability plan; and
- a student-led forum outlining the moral, ethical, and political implications of animal rights legislation proposed within the Maryland General Assembly.

Surveys show that, after seminar participation, faculty are likely to incorporate elements of civic engagement in a variety of courses, even those without a specific "civic engagement assignment," accounting for 20–30 percent of the course grade. Through this seminar, faculty are empowered to incorporate civic work into their classrooms, thereby empowering students to incorporate civics into their collegiate journeys.

How Higher Education Institutions Can Engage Students with Local Government: University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Marianne Wanamaker

On many campuses, discussions of civics and democratic values are a decidedly national project, meant to strengthen American democracy. But, dating back to the colonial era, American democracy is rooted in local politics and governance. At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the project of instilling democratic values takes a decidedly local approach, focusing on teaching students how to engage with the local issues, the local institutions, and the local leaders whose work constitutes the front-line of democracy in action.

The Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has pioneered initiatives to connect undergraduate students with their local government. The Institute, housed in the Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs, was established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2022 to increase civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic engagement among all Tennesseans, including students at the state's flagship land-grant campus. Although the Institute is housed in the Baker School, its influence is campus-wide.

The Institute's work in local government involves three distinct programs:

- a forum for discussing the issues most pressing for local policymakers;
- a Local Government Fellows program, in which students attend local government meetings; and
- local government internships.

All three programs are designed to establish a mutually productive relationship with local city and county governments.

Public Forum

In 2023, the Institute launched a Public Square lecture series. The series seeks to educate students, the public, and local lawmakers about issues that are resonant for the local government. The Institute invites experts to campus to educate attendees and engage in discussions with faculty members, elected officials, and community leaders. Topics have included community-based strategies for curbing gun violence; land use and the housing crisis; the challenge of homelessness; and the application of theory to practice.

Discussions of these topics are not limited to the lectures. Baker School undergraduate policy lab courses have picked up some of the issues from the Public Square series and, working with local government partners, provided evidence-based recommendations for potential solutions. Baker School students benefit from regular small-group discussions with local elected officials and policymakers on these and other policy challenges. They ask tough questions and explore the political hurdles facing any proposed policy.

Fellowship Program

The Institute provides an opportunity for students to learn about the local legislative process through the Local Government Fellows program. Any undergraduate across campus is eligible to apply for the program. Students are compensated for their time but do not earn course credit. The heart of the fellowship entails attending Knoxville City Council meetings with Institute faculty and staff members. The program also includes class sessions prior to and following these public meetings to help students prepare for and then fully appreciate what they witness. Topics for the class sessions include how items make it onto the government agenda, the difference between ordinances and resolutions, the impact of Roberts' Rules, and norms of councilmember conduct.

Fellowship participants report a renewed confidence in the democratic system as a result of their experiences, perhaps because the city council process produces measurable outcomes each week and community voices are heard and acknowledged routinely. Several students have since become involved in local campaigns for office because of this program.

Internship Program

Hands-on experience has no substitute.

The Institute's approach starts with the typical internship structure, in which a student is embedded in a public-sector department and works on projects in that department. Institute officials worked with the City of Knoxville, Knox County, the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, and selected nonprofits to secure a commitment to host paid internships. Officials meet prior to each semester with Institute faculty and staff to match student interests and skills with an appropriate department.

The Institute internship experience is designed to exceed that of the typical public-sector student internship. As part of the program, students engage in a classroom discussion where they learn how their internship department interacts with other units, how it interfaces with the public, and how it implements the policy priorities of its respective administration. In some cases, students attend public meetings in which their department, and sometimes their own work, is discussed or even challenged.

Through the internship, students not only get involved with local government, but they learn how sound policy is proposed, implemented, and evaluated.

Conclusion

The Institute of American Civics at the Baker School is pioneering ways to engage students with local government and to engage local government with institutions of higher education. The Institute's Public Square lecture series, Local Government Fellows program, and internship program have led to a greater sense of ownership over local issues among University of Tennessee, Knoxville, undergraduate students and a renewed appreciation for local government as a key arena for political problem-solving. By helping students get involved with local issues, universities can prepare them to be the local—and national—leaders of tomorrow.

APPENDIX:
Members of the Working Group on Building Democratic Citizens in Higher Education

Josh Blakely
Director, Brock Transformative Learning, Longwood University, Farmville, VA

Trevor Brown
Dean, John Glenn College of Public Affairs, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

David E. Campbell
Packey J. Dee Professor of American Democracy, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN

Jane Kamensky
President and CEO, Monticello/ The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Charlottesville, VA

Devorah Lieberman
President Emerita, University of La Verne, La Verne, CA

Fayneese Miller
President Emeritus and Professor of Psychology and Education Emeritus, Hamline University, St. Paul, MN

Laurie L. Patton
President and Professor Emerita, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT; President, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA

Sandra Peart
President, Jepson Scholars Foundation; Dean and E. Claiborne Robins Distinguished Professor in Leadership Studies, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA

Carol Quillen
President and CEO, National Trust for Historic Preservation; President Emerita, Davidson College, Davidson, NC

Ravi Perry
Professor, Department of Political Science, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Eric Reveno
James C. Gaither Associate Head Men's Basketball Coach, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA

Anthony Scott
Chief Inclusion & Belonging Officer, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

Sarah Surak
Professor Emerita in Political Science and Environmental Studies, Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD

Andrew Taramykin
J.D. Candidate, Emory University School of Law; former Student Civic Engagement Assistant, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

Nancy Thomas
Senior Advisor to the President for Democracy Initiatives and Executive Director, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE), Washington, D.C.; Former Director, IDHE, Tisch College, Tufts University, Medford, MA

Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo
Associate Vice Chancellor, Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy, Maricopa Community Colleges, Tempe, AZ

Ben Vinson III
18th President, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Presidential Research Professor, Baker-Nord Institute, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH; Hutchins Center ALARI Fellow, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Marianne Wanamaker
Professor and Dean, Howard H. Baker Jr. School of Public Policy and Public Affairs, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

Scott Warren
Visiting Fellow, SNF Agora Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

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