

**Discussion Guide for *Educating Citizens***  
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**I. Introduction**

Today's college graduates are less engaged in community affairs and public life than those of any preceding generation. AASCU's American Democracy Project is based on the belief that colleges and universities can play a critical role in confronting this problem by working to "produce graduates who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens in a democracy."

*Educating Citizens* makes the case that education for democratic citizenship is premised on a broad set of substantive values, ideals, and standards, some of which are connected to the academic enterprise itself (such as intellectual integrity, concern for truth, mutual respect, public discussion of contested ideas) and some of which are derived from the core values of American democracy (such as tolerance, concern for both the rights and welfare of individuals and the community, a commitment to civil and rational discourse). Providing this kind of education requires colleges and universities to look critically at the work they are doing – or are neglecting to do – to help students develop the combination of understanding, skills, values, and motivation needed to grapple with complex social problems and contribute to the civic life of our communities. (See the Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1 for discussion of these issues.)

Taking full advantage of the many opportunities in colleges and universities for the civic development of undergraduates is a significant undertaking. Some campuses, such as those we highlight in the book, have built comprehensive programs that attempt to do this and have found the results to be rewarding for the whole institution as well as for students and the communities they will enter. But small-scale change can also be extremely valuable. One faculty member doing a great job in one course can inspire, even transform, many cohorts of students. Even turning around a small handful of students, even turning around one student, can cause wide and long lasting ripples that may affect many more lives and communities.

Regardless what level of commitment to educating citizens is feasible for a campus at a given time, it is important to be reflective and intentional about the educational ends and means of that work so that it can be of the highest quality and effectiveness and so that it can be visible and thus provide the stimulus for further curriculum and program development.

We wrote *Educating Citizens* in part to show the importance of undergraduate moral and civic education, its feasibility, and its intellectual seriousness. We hope that what we have written will move some to support this kind of endeavor who might not have otherwise.

We also wrote it as a resource for the many faculty, administrators and student affairs staff who already believe in the civic mission of higher education, are working to educate their students as citizens, and want to learn more about how others are doing that work. We have been gratified to see that organizations, campuses, and individuals have used the book as the basis for reflecting on their current practice and planning for the future.

#### Purpose of Discussion Guide:

We offer this guide as a stimulus to reflection and conversation about the challenge at the heart of both our book and the American Democracy Project: preparing students for lives of thoughtful, engaged, and responsible democratic citizenship. The 165 institutions involved in the American Democracy Project have committed themselves to strengthening these goals by reflecting on the theory and practice of education for democratic citizenship, reviewing their current work in this area in the curriculum, extra-curriculum, and campus culture, and working within and across campuses to improve those efforts.

#### Suggestions for using the discussion guide:

Each campus group using the guide comes to it with a unique set of interests, goals, and challenges, and it can be fruitfully employed in different ways for different purposes:

- Taking a campus audit or inventory of current practices and opportunities related to education for democratic citizenship in three campus sites highlighted by our book and the American Democracy Project--academic programs, extracurricular programs and activities, and the institutional culture – and along three key developmental dimensions – knowledge, skills, and motivation.
- Building interest and motivation on the campus for broadening and deepening the institution’s commitment to education for democracy citizenship. This also involves addressing questions or concerns that members of the campus community may have about educating students for democratic citizenship. The American Democracy Project asks campuses to develop institutional commitment by involving senior administrators, faculty, staff and students; by addressing core institutional mission and purpose; and by focusing on civic engagement as a learning outcome for undergraduates.
- Fostering communication, interaction, and bridge-building between and among different segments of the campus. For example, many faculty may not be aware of support services offered for service-learning or faculty development programs that can help them use complex pedagogies; or student affairs staff may want to work with department heads and leaders of academic programs to find ways to connect campus programs more directly to relevant courses or departments.

- Helping to shape campus planning processes and set campus goals. The American Democracy Project encourages participating institutions to infuse civic engagement into the curriculum, extra-curriculum, and campus culture, and to initiate new projects, courses and teaching strategies, extracurricular programs, and other programs to increase civic engagement.

### Surveying the Campus: What Are You Doing Now, What Could You Be Doing Differently?

1. What should a civically responsible graduate of your campus look like? What examples of recent graduates come to mind and what kinds of college experiences did they have that seem to have contributed to their civic education? Did they have an important mentor on the campus? Were they part of a student club or group that got them involved in community problems? Did they take an influential course that provided opportunities to delve into the complexities of social questions related to a discipline?

One exercise you might want to do is to ask a group of faculty, a group of student affairs staff, and a group of students this question and see what kinds of responses they give. How do their responses differ from or overlap with one another? How do they map onto the categories of knowledge, skills, and motivation discussed in the book, such as learning to think clearly about difficult moral issues, learning to lead and build a consensus, and believing that it matters what they think and do civically and politically? (See Chapters 1 and 4.)

2. Could a student graduate from your campus without being exposed to opportunities to develop the understandings, skills, and motivation needed for civic responsibility? If so, what are some of the first steps you could take to change that?
3. In what ways are students gaining this kind of education for responsible democratic citizenship on your campus? In what areas is the campus already quite strong, and what areas could benefit from further development? How might a typical student answer these questions?
4. Thinking across the three focal sites (academic programs, extra-curriculum, and campus culture) what strike you as the top 3 “missed opportunities” – places where you could be doing more, or that seem to be a natural fit for moral and civic learning? What more do you need to know about the campus to make these assessments and how can you get this information?

We do not expect that every group will want to work through all the questions included in this guide. We invite you to skip around, to focus particular attention on sections or questions that you consider most relevant or most thought-provoking for your campus, and to create additional questions that allow you to tap into the work of your own institution. We do recommend, however, that in selecting the questions on which you want to focus, some attention should be given to each of the three arenas for moral and

civic learning emphasized by the American Democracy Project and our book: the campus climate, the curriculum, and the extra-curriculum.

## **II. Campus Culture or Climate**

A full-scale institutional commitment to undergraduate civic education involves creating a campus climate or culture that reinforces what students learn in their courses and extra-curricular activities. The campus culture is a powerful source of socialization, even for commuting students. Students are socialized through their perception of the institution's norms, including peer norms, and their habitual participation in routine practices and communal events.

Understanding the influence of the campus climate is not a simple matter, however, because culture, even within a single institution, is heterogeneous and dynamic. Students experience many cultural currents, some of which may conflict with each other. To add to the complexity, people pay attention to different things in their environment and understand the same experiences differently. For that reason, many aspects of campus culture will have different meanings and salience for different people.

There are many ways that colleges and universities can create a vibrant sense of mission and a distinctive culture that supports students' civic understanding and engagement. Many campuses have notable physical features or special locations that reflect the institution's mission and values. At Portland State University, for example, a prominent bridge calls attention to the university's special relationship with its local community with the inscription "Let Knowledge Serve the City." On some campuses, well-known stories, such as those that illuminate the founders' hopes for the institution, carry messages about the institution's civic values. Repeated rituals can also convey important civic meaning. At California State University Monterey Bay, for example, all new faculty and staff publicly sign the vision statement, which expresses the university's commitment to serving the diverse people of California, especially low-income populations. Other elements in the campus culture include strategies for socializing new students and faculty into the campus community and thoughtful responses to campus conflicts or the violation of important norms – "teachable moments."

As valuable as it is for an institution to create a cohesive culture that supports students' civic development, it is also critical for the culture to include strong support of intellectual, moral, and political open-mindedness. Reflecting honestly on what the institution and its programs stand for and opening those issues to dissent and new ideas will protect against coercion and help keep moral and civic education evolving, authentic, and alive.

A central goal for the American Democracy Project is to help students learn to be responsible community members. Students must come to appreciate not only the rights but the obligations of community membership. Like all communities, institutions of higher education have expectations for and make demands on their members as well as

providing them with benefits. Academic integrity is one clear and essential expectation for higher education, so it is worth paying special attention to how this norm is conveyed and enforced. Strong honor codes and the kinds of conversations they stimulate not only help deter academic dishonesty, they can also foster a climate of trust, civility, self-restraint, and mutual respect. Creative attention to academic integrity can also help foster an awareness of the critical place of integrity and trust for communities more broadly.

Another central value for higher education institutions is respect for people whose backgrounds, cultures, or beliefs differ from one's own. The campus culture can play an important role in supporting growth in students' understanding of unfamiliar cultural traditions and in promoting respectful engagement across difference, thus preparing graduates to function well in a diverse society and a globally interdependent world. A campus climate in which these values are salient can help students become more reflective about their own cultural backgrounds as well as developing better understanding of and respect for others.

All campuses offer 'teachable moments' for moral and civic development. Often these moments represent responses to real dilemmas with no obvious right answer – clashes of values within or across groups. These conflicts can be especially powerful teachable moments, because they require students to learn how to deal constructively with competing interests within a community.

For more background on campus climate, see Chapter 3, p. 83-95 and Chapter 8, p. 226-238.

Questions for discussion:

1. Is the institution's location in a particular community and region reflected in its civic mission? Are commitments to serving particular student populations reflected in its mission? If so, are these commitments evident in the campus culture?
2. Do entering first-year students receive mailings over the summer introducing them to the institution? If so, what do the materials reflect about the goals and values of the institution? Is this done for transfer students as well as freshmen? How might these materials be used more effectively to introduce students to important goals and values of the campus community?
3. Are freshmen asked to read a book or other material in preparation for their first year at college? If so, how are the readings chosen? What kind of follow-up on the reading, if any, takes place when they arrive at college? How could summer reading prior to entry be used more effectively to establish a positive moral and civic tone as students enter the institution?
4. How can transfer students best be prepared for their entry into a new institution so as to direct their attention to the institution's commitment to their development as engaged citizens?

5. Do orientation programs for freshmen and transfer students address the goals and values of the institution? How could orientation programs' introduction to the civic goals of higher education be improved?
6. How is the meaning and importance of academic integrity conveyed to students? Has there been a campus-wide conversation about cheating? What are the best ways to ensure that such a conversation will take place and be taken seriously by both students and faculty? Has the campus adopted or could it adopt mechanisms for connecting the issue of cheating with a broader set of norms and values that are central to academic work? Can discussions of student conduct codes be used to raise issues of what it means to be a responsible member of a community?
7. How do students learn about the importance of learning from and respecting others who are different from them in important ways? Has lack of inter-cultural or inter-group understanding led to conflicts? If so, how have the conflicts been handled and how can such conflicts best be used as learning opportunities in the future?
8. More generally, what teachable moments have occurred "on your watch" over the past year or two? Looking back with 20-20 hindsight, what might you and your colleagues have done to enhance student learning in connection with those incidents?
9. What stories are "iconic" on your campus – i.e. they are well-known across the campus and over time? Do those stories encapsulate important values or goals of the institution? Are there stories carrying positive moral and civic meaning that you wish more students, faculty, and staff knew? How could those stories be captured in forms that will reach students in a memorable way?
10. What special locations or physical features of the campus evoke important institutional values? What could be done to enrich this aspect of the campus or to make the existing features more dynamic and engaging?
11. How could key events, convocations, celebrations, and other rituals be used more effectively to establish an inspiring moral and civic climate?
12. How might you sponsor conversations about these key events and rituals to learn how various groups of students and faculty interpret their meaning and the values they convey?
13. How could you find out more about which aspects of the institution's moral and civic culture are most salient, meaningful, and memorable for students? These efforts could include, for example, guided focus groups with students, a survey, or a project that would create a moral/civic ethnography of the campus, which could then be used as a stimulus for conversations among students, faculty, and staff.

### **III. Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Faculty: Moral and Civic Learning in the Classroom**

There are many ways to ensure that courses intended to serve the purpose of moral and civic education actually accomplish that goal. How faculty teach, what they teach and the kind of support they receive for teaching are three critical elements of effective efforts to integrate moral and civic learning into the classroom.

In Chapter 5 of *Educating Citizens* we focus on pedagogical strategies for educating citizens. We note that the challenges of any good teaching— helping students achieve deep understanding of difficult ideas and relinquish misconceptions, imparting knowledge and skills they can really use and apply in new contexts, and reaching them on an emotional level, exciting passion and fostering commitment – are the same challenges of teaching for moral and civic development. Although a majority of faculty use lectures as their primary teaching tool, a growing number are adopting other, more student-centered approaches. Often called “pedagogies of engagement,” these approaches include service-learning, experiential education, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning. When used well, they can support deep understanding, usable knowledge, and skills, and enhance both personal connections and meaning.

Most campuses that effectively promote the civic engagement of their students have a center or office that coordinates civic efforts across the campus and assistance with community organizations. That office can also support faculty teaching for civic engagement—for example, by assisting in making community connections. In addition, many students come to college with no particular interest in moral and civic issues, and campuses need to make sure that those issues are not limited to electives chosen only by students who already show a strong interest in ethical concerns or social responsibility. In Chapter 6 of *Educating Citizens* we highlight a number of ways institutions around the country weave moral and civic learning into the curriculum.

Finally, national surveys show that most faculty believe it is important to prepare students for responsible citizenship and that their own institution should be actively engaged in solving social problems. These findings suggest that most faculty believe in and support the goals of the American Democracy Project. Unfortunately, research also suggests that most faculty feel overworked and, particularly when it comes to teaching, under-supported. Institutions seeking to make moral and civic education a priority must provide faculty with support and recognition for engaging in such efforts. There are a number of formal and informal ways to provide assistance and to recognition for this work (see pp. 210-217 of *Educating Citizens*).

## Questions for Discussion:

### Pedagogy

1. How prevalent is service-learning (community-based learning) on your campus? Research shows that high quality service-learning experiences include a strong integration of course content and service experiences, challenging service placements, and structured reflection on the relationship between course content and service experiences. How do service-learning courses on your campus incorporate these key elements?
2. How prevalent are other pedagogies of engagement on your campus? What kinds of curricular opportunities exist for students to work together on concrete, real-world problems?
3. Where do students learn critical thinking about ethical issues? Where do students learn critical thinking about civic issues and social problems?
4. Faculty often report that students are not willing to challenge each other's moral and political opinions or to engage fully in discussions of ethical issues and social problems. This reticence to engage in controversial discussions can prevent students from learning to articulate and justify effectively their own views (or adopt new perspectives when presented with high-quality evidence and arguments). To what extent is this a problem among students on your campus? What steps might be taken to address the problem?

### Curriculum

There are several effective ways to incorporate moral and civic issues into the general education curriculum. As part of the American Democracy Project campus around the country are reflecting on how their general education requirements and the goals of the American Democracy Project align.

5. Are the goals of the ADP built into the general education requirements at your institution? How?
6. How might students be encouraged to enroll in general education courses that focus on moral and civic issues?
7. To what extent are the goals of the American Democracy Project reflected in the "de facto" core curriculum (i.e., the small group of courses that most students take)?
8. How could these courses be modified or supplemented so as to ensure that moral and civic learning is integrated with academic learning?

**Project Suggestion:** While every major offers some opportunity for exploring the ethical dimensions and public impact of its work, it's easier to imagine integrating moral and civic learning into some disciplines. It might be useful for a few departments, together

with the provost office, to examine the connections between the goals of the ADP and the learning goals of their major.

### Faculty

9. Faculty development is essential to high-quality moral and civic education. Are there teaching centers, faculty development seminars, or other structured opportunities on campus for faculty to develop the substantive and pedagogical expertise needed? What are the informal opportunities for faculty to meet on regular basis to share ideas and concerns related to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as they contribute to civic engagement?
10. What logistic support does your institution provide for faculty who would like to use service-learning or other pedagogies of engagement? What kind support is available to faculty who want to adapt their syllabi to include learning goals that consistent with the goals of the American Democracy Project? How might that support be enhanced?
11. How are faculty encouraged to link to the American Democracy Project and to national organizations that promote civic engagement, such as Campus Compact?
12. What recognition do faculty receive for participating in efforts that advance the goals of the American Democracy Project? To what extent can compensation, tenure and promotion decisions be affected by such participation?
13. How might non-tenure track faculty be supported in the efforts to provide educational opportunities that align with the goals of the American Democracy Project?
14. What arrangements might be considered to attract and hire new faculty who already have an interest in teaching for civic responsibility?

## **IV. Moral and Civic Learning Beyond the Classroom**

Extra-curricular programs and activities offer rich opportunities for moral and civic learning, as we discuss in Chapter 8 of *Educating Citizens*. On most campuses, those experiences are not generally designed with the goal in mind of student civic engagement along the lines stressed by the American Democracy Project. In the main, they are student-generated or at least primarily shaped in response to student interests. With minor shifts, however, it may be possible to focus some of the extra-curricular activities and programs on your campus to promote moral and civic learning in terms of the knowledge and understanding, the skills, and the motivation needed for responsible citizenship.

Numerous studies have underscored the impact of the extra-curricular in student learning, such as those by Astin and by Kuh cited in *Educating Citizens*, pages 218 and 222. As Kuh discusses, that impact is likely to be greatest when extra-curricular activities are

intentionally designed with specific learning outcomes in mind—for our purposes, the outcomes that lead to civic engagement—when they are aligned with the mission of the campus as a whole so that curricular and extra-curricular activities can mutually reinforce each other, when they are overseen or guided by student affairs staff or faculty, and when they are regularly assessed. We cite the student leadership programs at Miami of Ohio University (page 251) as an example where these hallmarks of quality are in place.

Some extra-curricular activities are more explicitly aimed at civic engagement than others. Community-service organizations offer a particularly rich set of opportunities to gain understanding of some aspects of how a community functions, what problems it faces, the richness of its diversity, the need for individual commitments of time and energy to enhance community life, and the importance of working as a community to resolve community concerns. Those lessons are likely to be gained, however, only if the community-service program offers opportunities for structured reflection on the experiences and the civic-policy implications of those experiences.

Other student extra-curricular activities, such as political clubs, and those with an explicit agenda for social change, such as environmental organizations, are also likely to have the potential for civic learning. Certainly this is true for student government. And those campuses with student residences can utilize those facilities as sites for that learning. But almost any extra-curricular experience—such as student newspapers and radio stations, sororities and fraternities, clubs related to academic disciplines, and even student film clubs, may change students’ frameworks for interpreting civic life, their sense of what is important in civic terms, their confidence in their own abilities to affect the civic world around them, and their sense of who they are in civic terms and who they want to be.

Questions for discussion:

1. What extra-curricular activities on your campus offer the best opportunities for furthering the civic-engagement of students? If your campus has done the kind of “audit” suggested by the American Democracy Project, what did the audit reveal about extra-curricular activities with strong potential for promoting civic engagement? It may be useful to divide campus extracurricular activities into categories such as community service organizations; student government organizations; social change organizations; political organizations; student newspaper, radio, and other media organizations; and other activities.
2. In connection with those extra-curricular activities, what opportunities exist for structured reflection about civic engagement? How might such opportunities be created or enhanced?
3. How might academic advisors be helped to offer counsel to students about extra-curricular activities and programs in ways that encourage students to link their academic and career interests with those activities?

4. How might student organizations be encouraged to connect with moral and civic issues? Student newspaper editors might not think, for example, of bringing experts in journalism ethics to visit. Could such visits be supported by the university administration? (We know first-hand that this approach has been used with success on one campus.)
5. What opportunities are available to students to become informed about civic issues and current events, such speaker series, TV debates, and other forums? What might be done by the campus administration to expand those opportunities?
6. A number of extra-curricular organizations probably exist on your campus that focus particularly on the sub-set of civic issues that concern politics—both electoral politics and public policy making more generally. It may be worthwhile to consider these activities separately, both in terms of your campus “audit” and in developing plans to further the American Democracy Project. What steps might be taken to foster these activities by the campus administration (without risking seeming to promote a partisan position)?
7. Extra-curricular programs that operate on multiple campuses may offer excellent means to enhance the civic engagement of your students. The Model UN, for example, is active on many campuses and might be fostered on yours, if it is not already. Democracy Matters is another student-run organization that specifically promotes student political engagement. Does your campus participate in such programs? How might involvement in such programs be enhanced?
8. What programs does your campus sponsor to encourage civic engagement among alumni? What arrangements exist to link interested alumni and students around issues of civic concern? How might the campus administration promote such programs and arrangements?

**\*This document is a locally edited draft of a document shared by the authors with AASCU/American Democracy Project member institutions. Subsequent versions may be slightly different.**

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