BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS PROMOTING RECOMMITMENT TO THE CIVIC PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Purpose, edited by William V. Flores and Katrina S. Rogers. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019, 410 pages. ISBN: 9781498590945, hardcover.

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When it comes to civic learning and the preparation of students for democratic engagement, American higher education has faced significant peaks and valleys over several decades. The peaks usually reveal themselves after salient social challenges give institutions of higher education a wake-up call. For example, in response to pressing problems on the social, civic, economic, and moral fronts, Boyer's (1996) impassioned plea provided impetus for the pursuit of community-engaged scholarship. As the decade of the 1990s drew to a close, college and university leaders issued their Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education (Ehrlich et al., 1999). In addition, state and land-grant institutions recommitted themselves to engagement that would be responsive to the social and economic needs of their surrounding communities (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999).

Since then, higher education has been called upon to take stock of itself and, moreover, to renew its civic purpose (see, e.g., Cantor, 2020; National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Noting the "inordinate emphasis on narrow workforce development goals," the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) has suggested that such goals should not be allowed "to crowd out broader aims related to civic engagement and democratic renewal" (AGB, 2019, p. 1).

The role of higher education in promoting and helping to sustain American democracy has come into sharp focus at a time when the United States failed to get a good report card based on the Economic Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. Recently, the UK-based Economist Group's index downgraded the United States from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy" (Ma, 2018, para. 3). That report prompted the Kettering Foundation to convene a higher education Presidents Group and to establish a Deliberative Democracy Exchange with a view to promoting democracy and engaged citizenship more effectively through higher education.

Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education: Reclaiming Our Civic Purpose was inspired by the Kettering initiative as well as the work of the Points of Light Foundation, a global nonprofit organization dedicated to accelerating people-centered change. This volume of essays reflects the contributions

of institutional leaders and other key players, covering a range of topics pertinent to the civic role of college and universities. Divided into five sections, the volume consists of 21 chapters (complemented by a foreword and an introduction), most featuring the voices of college and university presidents. One section presents the perspectives of directors of campus-based civic engagement and public deliberation centers.

Editors William V. Flores and Katrina S. Rogers provide an informative introduction in which they paint a dismal picture of American democracy, marked by challenges to freedom of expression, distrust and cynicism about the government, and low rates of voter participation. However, Flores and Rogers point to the vital role that college and university presidents play in creating a culture of community engagement. Institutions instill knowledge, reinforce ethical values, stimulate critical thinking, offer opportunities for the practical application of knowledge, and prepare students to engage in meaningful discussions and debates.

Section I is titled “Rising to the Challenge.” The first chapter, by Flores and Noël Bezette-Flores, adds to the contextual information contained in the introduction. (Neil Bush, the Points of Light board chair, contributed the book’s foreword.) In chapter 2, Kettering CEO David Mathews presents what he sees as “Democracy’s Challenge for Academe”—essentially the challenge to again become, and remain, a “public good” (p. 55). Meeting that challenge, as Mathews explains, requires realigning the work of higher education institutions with the work of citizens while attending to democratic practices. Specifically, he recommends that students learn deliberation—the process of making collective decisions with others about possible collective action—and that some civic education courses be focused on democracy, including the role of citizens. In chapter 3, Rogers addresses issues related to technology, economic inequality, and globalization as both threats and opportunities that leaders in a democratic society should consider.

In section II, presidents lend their voices to the call for the renewal of higher education’s civic purpose. Based on discussions with a number of them, Sean Creighton (who was president of a regional higher education council for 15 years) shares pertinent perspectives from presidents. Despite pressure to place greater emphasis on local workforce development, presidents have not abandoned or even sidelined civic engagement. In this section, chapters by Jonathan Alger and Abraham Goldberg, Rev. Monsignor Franklyn M. Casale, Adam Weinberg, and Rogers illustrate mission-driven, social justice-focused initiatives that have proved beneficial to students and transformative for institutions.

Section III draws attention to democratic engagement by institutions in urban settings. Flores shares lessons from “democracy in action” at his university (p. 151), and David Wilson articulates expectations and experiences “when the fight for democracy and justice is the founding purpose” of one’s institution (p. 169). It is easy to draw inspiration from Wilson’s exemplary leadership of one of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities, with its young “citizen leaders” (p. 175), who made their presence felt in Baltimore after a Black man named Freddie Gray died while in police custody. Additionally, in this section of the book, Rassoul Dastmozd offers a “pragmatic perspective” from a community college (p. 181), and Otto Lee and Kevin Drumm make it clear that community colleges are considered the primary locations of democracy work in higher education.

The four chapters of section IV focus on student learning and democracy. Terrence Bensel and James Mullen describe Allegheny College’s Community Wellness Initiative, which had a remarkable impact on students and the community, and Waded Cruzado shows how her institution is renewing the promise of land-grant universi-

ties by investing in economically disadvantaged, less-prepared students who “may one day change the world” (p. 222). In the third chapter, Eduardo M. Ochoa describes California State University, Monterey Bay’s attention to regional stewardship and the nurturing of democracy through a model service-learning program, a cradle-to-career educational partnership, and community dialogues. In the last chapter of this section, Sean Decatur highlights the preparation of college students for the practice of “inclusive citizenship” in a diverse democracy (p. 233).

In the final section, readers hear from center directors as they reflect on civic/community engagement. The chapter by Windy Y. Lawrence and Bezette-Flores, with John Locke (a student leader), titled “The Cultivation of Practical Wisdom: Triangulating Community Engagement, Service Learning, and Public Deliberation Through Our Interact-to-Innovate Evidence-Based Curriculum,” reflects the misconception that service-learning and public deliberation are different from community engagement rather than both being approaches of community engagement. The chapter also incorrectly conveys that the authors developed the concept of *triangulation* that they applied to civic engagement.

In the second of five chapters in section V, Azuri L. Gonzalez delineates the functions of community engagement professionals and traces her own journey as a professional in the field. Meanwhile, Amanda Buberger discusses the strengthening of public service partnerships in a higher education context characterized by institutionalized civic practices. In his chapter, Martín Carcasson provides explicit guidance regarding the practice of deliberative engagement to battle “wicked problems, hyper-partisanship, and truth decay” (p. 319). And in the final chapter, Harry C. Boyte argues that “higher education holds enormous potential to help build vital communities and awaken democracy itself if it recovers the public and civic dimensions of disciplines and professions” (p. 350). Boyte advocates “citizen professionalism” (p. 354) as the way for higher education to “help to rekindle the democratic promise” (p. 356).

In the book’s conclusion, the editors make 10 recommendations for improving civic engagement on college and university campuses. Notable among the recommendations are to promote a campus culture of civic involvement, embed democratic values and practices in the curriculum, and forge sustainable partnerships with the community.

Democracy, Civic Engagement, and Citizenship in Higher Education is a welcome addition to the civic engagement literature. Presidents and civic engagement leaders of colleges and universities will find this volume informative and instructive. Given the breadth of the civic engagement approaches and the depth of the democracy-focused perspectives it conveys, this volume can serve as a catalyst for reaffirming institutional commitment to deepening civic learning and strengthening democratic engagement among all stakeholders in higher education.

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