

A PRAXIS BRIEF

Campus Compact's
Response to
*A Crucible Moment:
College Learning
and
Democracy's Future*



Campus Compact

INTRODUCTION

A Praxis Brief highlights the intersection between Campus Compact’s mission and *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future* (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). The latter report, produced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) at the invitation of the U.S. Department of Education, calls on higher education to embrace

PRAXIS: The process by which a theory, lesson, skill, or idea is applied or realized.

civic learning and democratic engagement as an “undisputed educational priority” (p. 2). Campus Compact, the only national higher education organization dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, has advanced this view for more than 25 years.

A Crucible Moment underscores both the necessity of our work and the troubling state of civic knowledge within higher education. For example, it is not sufficient that, as the report notes, only one-third of college students surveyed “strongly agreed that faculty publicly advocate the need for students to become active and involved citizens” (p. 41) or that only one-third strongly agreed that their education increased their civic capacities.

By exploring ways that campuses can implement the vision described in the larger report, this *Praxis Brief* underscores Campus Compact’s commitment to empowering colleges and universities as vital agents and architects of a diverse democracy. It affirms the strategic opportunity for more than 1,100 Campus Compact member campuses to inculcate civic learning and community engagement. In addition, the *Brief* offers resources for exploring *A Crucible Moment’s* roadmap to creating a civically engaged campus and provides a rationale for transforming teaching, research, service, and institutional systems in order to serve our institutions’ commitment to the public good.

Although Campus Compact member institutions perform significantly better than their peers on national measures of engagement such as the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll and the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, more strategic efforts will ensure that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to be active and engaged citizens.

CONTEXT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION’S CIVIC MISSION

Historically, higher education was designed as a means of educating citizen leaders to further democracy in our nation. Following World

War II, President Truman’s Commission on Higher Education (1947) grounded the future of collegiate learning in the promotion of democratic values and purposes. *A Crucible Moment* endorses these purposes and charges the nation’s colleges and universities to:

- Develop cohesive, intentional strategies for fostering democratic engagement and civic learning across an institution’s culture, structures, and learning environments.
- Prepare students, regardless of discipline, to be civic problem solvers by embedding the goals of civic literacy, civic inquiry, and civic action into their college experiences.
- Develop a robust schema of civic learning that supports a central priority of educating students to be what *A Crucible Moment* calls “knowledgeable, public spirited, and engaged” citizens who “rehearse citizenship daily” (p. 2). This explicitly acknowledges that offering one civic experience is not the same as developing a pervasive strategy of civic learning.
- Differentiate community service from civic learning. Some engaged learning strategies, such as service-learning, might enhance civic learning as *one part* of an integrated program of civic learning.
- Develop transformative partnerships—domestic and international—with the institution’s wider community. Such partnerships are critical to rallying diverse stakeholders around public problems, thus converting civic knowledge into civic action.

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ORGANIZING SCHEMAS FOR ENGAGEMENT

A Crucible Moment offers two organizing schemas: a roadmap for the civic-minded campus and a framework for civic learning and democratic engagement. A civic-minded campus exhibits the full array of civic dimensions: a civic ethos governing campus life, civic literacy as a goal for every student, civic inquiry integrated within the majors and general education, and civic action as a lifelong practice (see Table 1, adapted from p. 15 of *A Crucible Moment*). Developing civic learning and engagement requires a range of knowledge, skills, values, and collective actions (see Table 2, adapted from p. 4 of *A Crucible Moment*).

TABLE 1: What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?

CIVIC ETHOS governing campus life

The infusion of democratic values into everyday practices, structures, and interactions; an emphasis on open-mindedness, civility, ethical behavior, and concern for others; a spirit of public-mindedness that influences the institution's goals and its engagement with local and global communities.

CIVIC LITERACY as a goal for every student

The cultivation of knowledge of fundamental principles and debates about democracy; familiarity with key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements undertaken to achieve democracy's full promise; the ability to think critically about complex issues that have public consequences.

CIVIC INQUIRY integrated within the majors and general education

The practice of inquiring about the civic dimensions of a subject; exploration of the personal, social, and environmental impact of choices; consideration of differing views; the ability to analyze civic intellectual debates within one's major or areas of study.

CIVIC ACTION as lifelong practice

The capacity and commitment to work collectively to address common problems; the practice of working to improve the quality of people's lives and the sustainability of the planet; the ability to analyze systems to plan and engage in public action; the moral and political courage to take risks for the greater public good.

These two tables propose a vision and a model for the civic-minded campus. We urge Campus Compact members to weave these principles throughout their campuses, and in particular across the complex institutional lines between student and academic affairs.

CIVIC LEARNING AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY

Colleges and universities must be concerned with their core institutional priorities of teaching, learning, research, career preparation, and student access and retention. According to the works of many civic and higher education leaders, such as the 1947 President's Commission report, the recent book *"To Serve A Larger Purpose": Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education* (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), and now *A Crucible Moment*, higher education must also be concerned with democratic and civic purposes. Although some might cast these larger public purposes as being in tension with other priorities of the academy, *A Crucible Moment* argues that these

TABLE 2: A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

Knowledge	Skills	Values
Familiarity with key democratic texts, principles, and debates in the U.S. and elsewhere	Critical inquiry, analysis, and reasoning	Respect for freedom and human dignity
Historical and sociological understanding of major democratic movements	Quantitative reasoning	Empathy; open-mindedness; tolerance
Knowledge of the diverse cultures, histories, values, and conflicts that have shaped world societies	Ability to gather and evaluate multiple sources of evidence	Equality; justice; ethical integrity
Exposure to multiple religious traditions and views about the relation between religion and government	Capacity for seeking, engaging, and being informed by multiple perspectives	Responsibility to a larger good
Knowledge of the political systems that frame democracies and of political levers for influencing change	Written, oral, and multi-media communication	Collective Action Integration of knowledge, skills, and values to inform actions taken with others
	Deliberation and bridge-building across differences	Moral discernment and behavior
	Collaborative decision making	Navigation of political systems and processes
	Ability to communicate in multiple languages	Public program solving with diverse partners
		Compromise, civility, and mutual respect

concerns are in fact complementary: “It is time to bring two national priorities—career preparation and increased access and completion rates—together in a more comprehensive vision with a third national priority: fostering informed, engaged, responsible citizens” (p. 13).

Fostering the intersection among these priorities entails applying several strategies:

- Making significant scholarly and pedagogical contributions to the processes of knowledge generation, conducted in collaboration with the wider community, required for civic action.
- Recognizing and preparing for the civic dimensions of every career field, including developing a sense of ethical and social responsibility.

ity. Capacities needed in both the workplace and democratic society include “effective listening and oral communication, creative/critical thinking and problem solving, the ability to work effectively in diverse groups, agency and collaborative decision making, ethical analyses of complex issues, and intercultural understanding” (*A Crucible Moment*, p. 11).

- Acknowledging that students who participate in civic learning activities perform better academically and are more likely to remain enrolled and complete their degrees.

LEVERAGING EXISTING PROCESSES

Regional accreditation and the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification are two established processes that may deepen your campus’s commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement as well as help leaders think strategically about ways to implement this commitment.

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Regional Accreditation

All institutions of higher education must undergo regular reviews to maintain their accreditation. Most accrediting organizations articulate standards

that support civically engaged learning in some form; campuses may use these standards to leverage change within their institutions.

Six regional accrediting agencies set educational standards for U.S. post-secondary institutions. These agencies review the quality of education and the eligibility of colleges and universities for federal Title IV student aid. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation recognizes these agencies and establishes basic standards for all of them, but each agency develops standards for its region. For information on how your institution can align its civic engagement efforts with regional accrediting standards, visit www.compact.org.

To learn more about accrediting standards, contact one of the six regional agencies below:

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, www.ncahlc.org

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, www.middlestates.org

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, www.neasc.org

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, www.nwccu.org

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, www.sacs.org

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges, www.wascweb.org

Campus Compact will provide training and support to members applying for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.

Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

The framework for the 2015 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification has not yet been released, but in 2010 the application stressed the prominence of engagement in institutional mission in the following areas: strategic plans, assessment, coordination and communication of priorities, recruitment and development of faculty, inclusion of students and community partners as leaders, integration with both curricular and non-curricular activities, and development of reciprocal partnerships with the wider community.

A Crucible Moment provides a guide for action in each of these areas, from the development of a cohesive civic learning strategy that reflects the institution's mission to the establishment of collaborative community partnerships that allow for civic problem solving. For an institution that is serious about civic learning and engagement, the application process for the Community Engagement Classification can provide a means to structure and leverage institution-wide conversations and data-gathering efforts.

The 2015 Community Engagement Classification process will be announced in January 2013. Campuses awarded the Classification in 2006 and 2008 must reapply through an abbreviated process, while those that received the Classification in 2010 do not need to reapply during this cycle. Institutions new to the classification must complete a full application. (For more information, see <http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org>.) Campus Compact will provide training and support to members that intend to apply for the classification.

NEXT STEPS FOR YOUR CAMPUS

A Crucible Moment outlines a number of strategies to build an ethos of civic learning and democratic engagement, beginning with five essential actions (p. 30). These actions are outlined below, along with some specific ideas and questions to provoke thinking around next steps:

1. *Reclaim and reinvest in the fundamental civic and democratic mission of higher education.*
 - Create dialogue communities to discuss how *A Crucible Moment* relates to your campus's mission, vision, and strategic priorities. (See the discussion guide at the end of this *Praxis Brief* for dialogue starters.)
 - How can your institution move students from civic learning to civic action? Campuses must be intentional in creating pathways for students to move from gathering knowledge and skills to putting them into action.
2. *Enlarge the current national narrative that erases civic aims and civic literacy as educational priorities.*
 - Demonstrate the link between civic engagement and college persistence/completion for policy makers, funders, and campus leaders.
 - Review your civic engagement offerings and how students utilize them. Do students typically engage in one isolated experience, or is civic engagement woven throughout their curricular and co-curricular experiences? What changes can be made to ensure that civic learning is at the core of their education?
3. *Advance a contemporary, comprehensive framework for civic learning that embraces U.S. and global interdependencies.*
 - Encourage study abroad/study away opportunities for students; create strong reflective programs to help students make meaning of these experiences in relation to historic and current civic competencies.
 - Develop a robust civic engagement program that includes both curricular service-learning opportunities and co-curricular service opportunities.
4. *Capitalize upon the interdependent responsibilities of K-12 and higher education.*
 - Create a K-16 education council that includes representatives from local school districts, campuses, government agencies, and businesses to create collective goals for increased civic competency.
5. *Expand the number of robust, generative civic partnerships and alliances locally, nationally, and globally.*

- Develop collaborative, generative partnerships with the wider community that value local expertise so that action for the public good can be undertaken.

For further exploration, an institution may draw from Tables 1 and 2 above and map out ways to cultivate a civic-minded campus through knowledge, skills, values, and collective action. For example:

- Communicate your institutional commitment to civic learning in public ways.
- Implement engaged pedagogies (e.g., service-learning, collective civic problem solving, deliberative dialogues) as means for students to practice citizenship and civic leadership.
- Develop capstone experiences for students to summarize their civic development across the range of strategies your campus has adopted. Consider having seniors create a portfolio of their civic learning and their plans for carrying this knowledge into their lives post-graduation.
- Define the public purposes of the disciplines and fields represented at your institution.
- Model democratic practices as an institution.

CAMPUS DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is designed to facilitate discussion within key stakeholder groups that recognizes their spheres of influence and prepares them for having a larger institutional conversation. Questions are aimed at four audiences: presidents and other institutional decision makers, administrators (e.g., center directors, directors of student or academic affairs), faculty members, and students. All groups should review the *Praxis Brief* in preparation for these conversations.

Presidents and Other Institutional Decision Makers

1. In what ways does a civic learning or democratic engagement ethos complement your mission?
2. Which of your institutional priorities (e.g., rigorous educational offerings, student access and retention, professional preparation) enhance or support civic learning?
3. Who are the key stakeholders who must be involved in developing (or extending) a civic learning initiative across your campus?

4. Referring to Table 1 of the *Praxis Brief*, how might your institution better meet the four elements of a civic-minded campus? Which of these elements is most challenging for your institutional context?
5. Reflecting upon the knowledge, skills, values, and collective experiences offered by *A Crucible Moment* (see Table 2 of the *Praxis Brief*), which of these elements are already central to your institution's learning outcomes? What curricular and co-curricular activities facilitate acquisition and practice of these elements?
6. How might a civic learning ethos or initiative garner additional revenue for your campus?

Administrators (Student Affairs/Academic Affairs Program Directors)

1. How does your program embrace a civic learning or democratic engagement ethos? What other programs on your campus do so?
2. Referring to Table 2 of the *Praxis Brief*, which knowledge, skills, values, and collective experiences are articulated within your program's design? If your program/unit coordinates diverse activities (such as service-learning classes or alternative spring breaks), does each of these activities articulate similar objectives? How can you encourage cohesiveness between your program's objectives and activities?
3. Do you contribute to your institution's self-study for regional accreditation? How might you contribute information about your civic learning initiatives to the next self-study?
4. Do you oversee or participate in your institution's Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application? How can you encourage greater reflection on civic learning within your institution's 2015 application?
5. What similarities and differences do you perceive between the types of partnerships called for within *A Crucible Moment* and the partnerships you facilitate? What do you think the report means by "collaborative civic problem solving"? Do your existing partnerships allow for such problem solving? Do they provide opportunities for students to practice citizenship?
6. Are your institutional decision makers familiar with *A Crucible Moment*? What parts of this *Praxis Brief* might be helpful to share with them? How can sharing the report and the brief also bring attention to the ways in which your program supports civic learning and democratic engagement?

Faculty

1. In what ways do your classes reflect the knowledge, skills, values, and collective experiences suggested in Table 2 of the *Praxis Brief*? Are these objectives aligned with larger student learning outcomes within your institution? How can you connect civic learning outcomes with the learning objectives of your institution?
2. How are the public purposes of your discipline defined?
3. How do various engaged pedagogies (e.g., service-learning, collaborative civic problem solving, deliberative dialogue) differ from one another, and what elements do they share? Which of them seem to be most complementary to your teaching style?
4. What opportunities exist for you to become involved in developing your institution's general education curriculum? How can you introduce the people in charge of curriculum development to *A Crucible Moment* and this *Praxis Brief*?
5. What types of civic learning assessment and research are feasible for you to conduct? (See p. 35 of *A Crucible Moment* for examples.) Are you familiar with the publishing outlets for such work? Consider consulting your state Campus Compact for suggestions.

Students

1. In what ways do your classes reflect the knowledge, skills, values, and collective experiences suggested in Table 2 of the *Praxis Brief*? Which classes align with these experiences?
2. Do any of your classes incorporate teaching methods such as service-learning, community-based research, collaborative civic problem solving, or deliberative dialogue? What elements do they share? Which of them seem to be most complementary to your learning style?
3. What opportunities exist through your classes or co-curricular experiences for you to become involved in transformative community partnerships where your civic learning is applied?

REFERENCES

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ABOUT THE PRAXIS BRIEF

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ABOUT CAMPUS COMPACT

Campus Compact is a national coalition of nearly 1,200 college and university presidents—representing some 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact advances the public purposes of colleges and universities by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility.

Campus Compact comprises a national office based in Boston and state affiliates in CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, MA, ME, MD/DC, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VT, WA, WI, and WV.

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