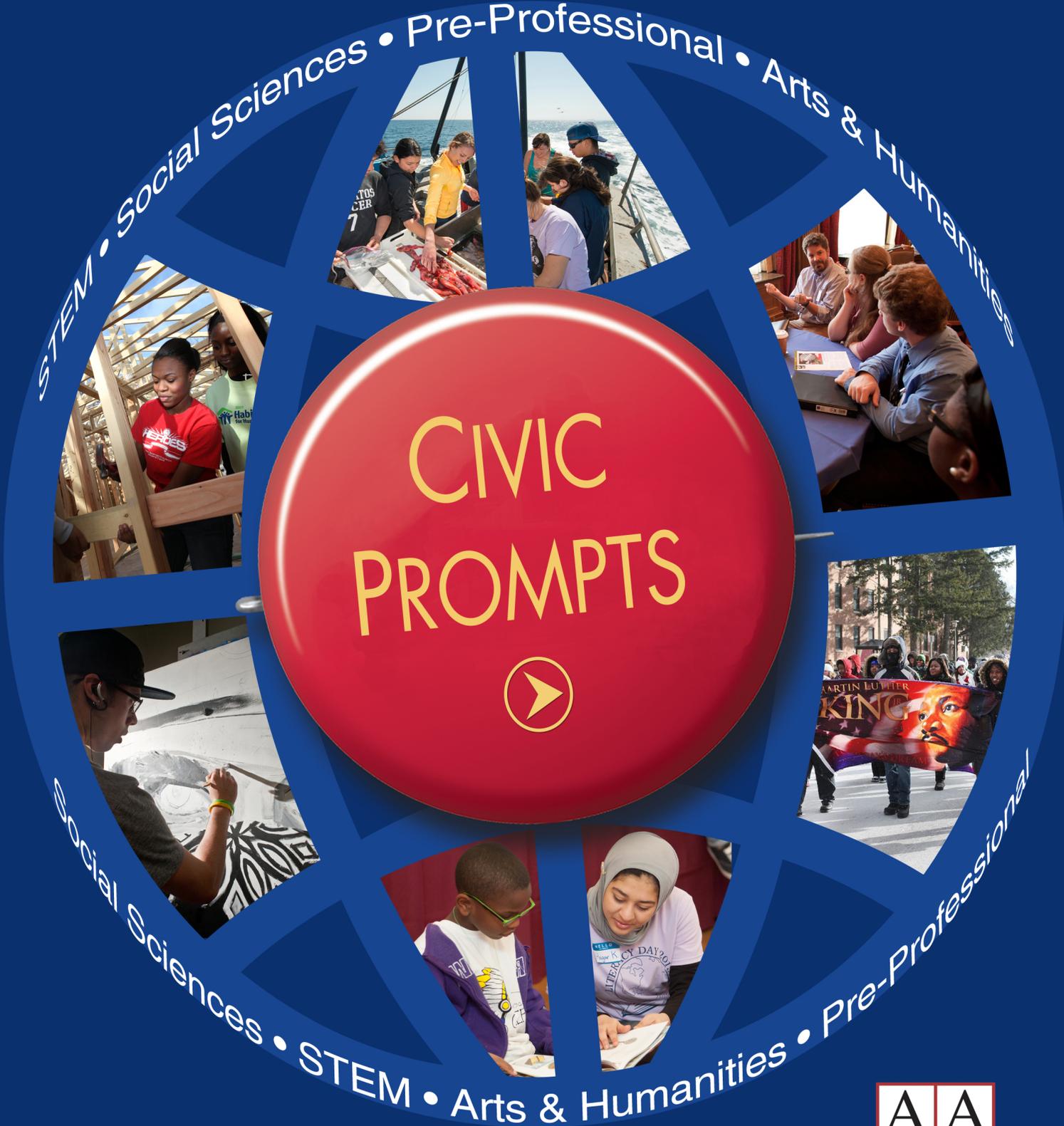


# Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines



By Caryn McTighe Musil





# **CIVIC PROMPTS:**

## **Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines**

**By Caryn McTighe Musil**





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## Acknowledgments

The work represented in this report was inspired by one of the key recommendations in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*: to infuse all disciplines and specialized studies with a civic lens. The report with its National Call to Action was released at the White House in 2012 and supported by the US Department of Education.

Immediately after the report's release, The Robert R. McCormick Foundation was quick to step up to support proposals by AAC&U to initiate engagement with Chicago area two- and four-year colleges and universities in response to *A Crucible Moment's* recommendations. For this specific McCormick-funded project, "Civic Inquiry and Action Across the Disciplines," and for McCormick's overall leadership, AAC&U extends its special gratitude for the Foundation's unwavering support of cultivating informed and engaged citizens. Its sustained commitment to organizations, scholars, and community groups that promote citizen engagement has made our US democracy a stronger one. I would also like to acknowledge the responsiveness and leadership of Andrea Jett Fletcher, my program officer at the McCormick Foundation during this project. She attended all our meetings and offered wise counsel to me at key points during the life of the project.

Offering their expertise as national scholars and practitioners, three distinguished people served as disciplinary cluster consultants facilitating the following groups:

- Dr. Tania Mitchell, Assistant Professor, Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, University of Minnesota (Business and Pre-Professional Cluster),
- Dr. Cathy Middlecamp, Professor of Environmental Studies, Integrated Liberal Studies, and Chemistry affiliate, University of Wisconsin-Madison (STEM Cluster), and
- Dr. Dick W. Simpson, Professor, Political Science, University of Illinois at Chicago (Social Sciences Cluster).

The project could not have been done without them. They offered advice, helped shaped the meetings, facilitated provocative discussion that produced generative thinking from the faculty members in their clusters, and helped distill the findings afterwards. I took responsibility as the consultant facilitating the Arts and Humanities Cluster.

There would have been no project if the top leaders at seven institutions that comprise thirteen separate campuses had not agreed that investigating the civic dimensions of disciplines and specialized studies was worth doing. We are grateful to the presidents and academic administrators for their leadership when there are so many competing obligations and in a period of such difficult financial constraints. The following institutions were participants in this funded initiative:

- City Colleges of Chicago with representation from the following campuses:  
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- Governors State University
- Lewis University
- North Park University
- Northern Illinois University
- Roosevelt University
- University of Illinois at Chicago

It is one thing to pledge involvement from above, but it is faculty members who actually implement innovation in departments, courses, and classrooms on the ground. We extend our gratitude to all of those involved in the project who were willing to invest their time, share their insights, and voluntarily assign themselves added obligations by participating in a project that offered no stipend other than good food, stimulating company, and a rich exchange of ideas.

As part of the design of the project, AAC&U also sought the partnership of Illinois Campus Compact whose mission is to promote civic learning and engagement at colleges and universities. Dr. Kathy Engelken, Illinois Campus Compact Executive Director, quickly assented, bringing her enthusiasm, expertise in civic engagement, and statewide network of colleges and universities. The final person to acknowledge is Carol-lynn Swol, AAC&U's program assistant for this project. With organizational acumen to spare, she made sure all the details for the meetings ran smoothly, and her experience as a community college faculty member brought added integrity to all we sought to do.

This was always seen as a pilot project. The faculty members and their participating institutions were the pioneers who proved it should be more than that. Exploring the civic dimensions of disciplines is largely uncharted waters. To do it comprehensively needs further investments by disciplinary societies, foundations and other funding agencies, and colleges and universities themselves. This monograph provides one resource for beginning that transformational educational work.

We have put some toes in the water with this project on the civic dimensions of the major. We encourage you to wade in with us.

**Caryn McTighe Musil, Ph.D.**

**Senior Scholar and Director of Civic Learning and Democracy Initiatives  
Association of American Colleges and Universities**

## I. Introduction

*“The first and most essential charge upon higher education is that at all levels and in all its fields of specialization, it shall be the carrier of democratic values, ideals, and process.”*

President’s Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy*

This publication, *Civic Prompts: Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines*, seeks to embrace the 1947 recommendation from The President’s Commission on Higher Education uttered almost seventy years ago. *Civic Prompts* strives to translate this idealistic call into the everyday teaching world of faculty members who are responsible for constructing the many layered components of each course offered in their department. Designed for faculty members in particular, *Civic Prompts* offers in the fourth section of this publication a practical set of steps to use to infuse within majors, specialized studies, and interdisciplinary programs key civic and democratic concerns affecting the public good. It also takes to heart the Call to Action from a more recent publication, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future* (2012), released at the White House, in which higher education was urged to “define within departments, programs, and disciplines the public purposes of their respective fields, the civic inquiries most urgent to explore, and the best way to infuse civic learning outcomes progressively across the major” (32).

Both reports were issued with a sense of urgency. World War II shattered economies, eviscerated democratic nations, destroyed life and landscape at a scale heretofore unimaginable, and revealed grisly horrors when few moral compasses governed individuals or nation-states. President Harry Truman understood that the world needed more than just an economic revival represented in part by the ambitious Marshall Plan. Convinced that colleges and universities should play a vital role in creating a different global future, he appointed a Commission on Higher Education, chaired by American Council on Education president George F. Zook. The Commission mapped a modern mission for the academy in a series of reports in 1947. Many of the Commission’s recommendations have been followed: from ending the academy’s racial segregation, to the expansion of access to four-year institutions, and to the establishment of community colleges. Driving all of the recommendations, however, was the Commission’s reaffirmation of the civic mission of higher education.

Nowhere is that more emphatically stated than in the Commission’s summary statement about what the overall goals for higher education should be:

- Education for a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living.
- Education directly and explicitly for international understanding and cooperation.
- Education for the application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and to the administration of public affairs.

President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947

*A Crucible Moment*, organized through a joint project with the U.S. Department of Education, The Global Perspectives Inventory, Inc., and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, picks up the baton of these three cornerstone goals for higher education. The national report is grounded in the teaching experience of faculty, the research about the impact of civic learning and democratic engagement on students and the community, and a deep conviction that without higher education embracing fully its critical civic mission, US democracy will be put at risk.

A key recommendation in *A Crucible Moment* states: "Expect students to map their capacity to make civic inquires a part of their intellectual biography over the course of their studies and to reflect on and demonstrate their cumulative learning through general education, their majors, and their out-of-class experiences" (32). *Civic Prompts* tackles one of those frontiers: the major. Identifying the expected levels of civic achievement within fields, the report argues, would influence the boundaries of the subjects studied, the pedagogies adopted, and how students prepared themselves for their professional lives as well as for their participation in the civic life of their local and global communities. The major is, after all, where students devote the greatest portion of their academic studies. In turn, those studies often determine the course of their professional lives.

*A Crucible Moment* was released at the White House in 2012 in the midst of an inherited economic recession that many argued was matched in equal fury by a civic recession. The report enumerated extensive and troubling evidence of this civic anemia, including the fact that the U.S ranked 139<sup>th</sup> in voter participation of 172 world democracies in 2007 (1). But the report also offered good news about the foundation for civic learning and democratic engagement that had been partially laid in higher education over the intervening six decades since the Truman Commission. It could be found in the curriculum and in co-curricular life as well as in the explosion of campus/community partnerships through which students transgressed the boundaries of their campus to be more fully engaged in learning about the larger local and global communities to which they were connected. Or as the Truman Commission phrased it, being educated about the "application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems" and through that to the wider world of "public affairs."

Despite the evidence of increased opportunities for students to expand their civic knowledge and skills while in college, especially through community-based engagement, *A Crucible Moment* found that these opportunities were for the most part random, unconnected, uneven, optional, and available only to some students. With its recommendations formulated by a broad and varied constituency within and beyond higher education and by a National Advisory Task Force, *A Crucible Moment* mapped how civic learning and democratic engagement could become more pervasive, integrative, and intentional. The report set a high bar: make such learning expected for every college student. But how can the academy move civic learning from niches to norms?

## II. A New Blueprint for Educating for Democracy

*“A socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy. . .require[s] informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in ‘doing’ democracy. . . .Civic learning needs to be an integral component of every level of education, from grade school through graduate school, across all fields of study.”*

### A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future

*A Crucible Moment* posits three principal strategies for making civic learning and democratic engagement unavoidable for students while in college. The first involves expanding a too narrowly conceived and outdated definition of what civic learning actually entails. The second offers a set of markers defining what would characterize a civic-minded institution. The third argues that students need to have multiple, differential, and developmentally designed opportunities to cultivate the capabilities necessary in a multiracial, multi-ethnic, religiously and economically diverse democracy like ours nested as we are in a global network of interdependencies. Most importantly, driving each of these strategies is the insistence on chances for students to practice their ever-evolving democratic capabilities in unscripted, hands-on environments that address big issues of common concern and public consequence. This becomes an arena where students can not only read about how to exercise collective civic agency with diverse partners but actually engage in the process of doing it.

In the first recommendation that governs the scope of what is considered as “counting” for civic learning, *A Crucible Moment* insists that the existing definition is far too contracted. As typically understood, a constricted view of civic learning would produce citizens with too little knowledge or too few skills to be informed and effective participants in a diverse democracy. The report therefore offers as one of its overriding essential actions that higher education needs to:

Advance a contemporary, comprehensive framework for civic learning—embracing US and global interdependence—that includes historic and modern understandings of democratic values, capacities to engage diverse perspectives and people, and commitment to collective civic problem solving (vi).

The chart below outlines some of the possible elements of this more comprehensive framework for 21<sup>st</sup> century civic learning and democratic engagement that some colleges and universities across the country have adopted.

## A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

### Knowledge

- Familiarity with key democratic texts and universal democratic principles, and with selected debates—in US and other societies—concerning their applications
- Historical and sociological understanding of several democratic movements, both US and abroad
- Understanding one's sources of identity and their influence on civic values, assumptions, and responsibilities to a wider public
- Knowledge of the diverse cultures, histories, values, and contestations that have shaped US and other world societies
- Exposure to multiple religious traditions and to alternative views about the relation between religion and government
- Knowledge of the political systems that frame constitutional democracies and of political levers for influencing change

### Skills

- Critical inquiry, analysis, and reasoning
- Quantitative reasoning
- Gathering and evaluating multiple sources of evidence
- Seeking, engaging, and being informed by multiple perspectives
- Written, oral, and multi-media communication
- Deliberation and bridge building across differences
- Collaborative decision making
- Ability to communicate in multiple languages

### Values

- Respect for freedom and human dignity
- Empathy
- Open-mindedness
- Tolerance
- Justice
- Equality
- Ethical integrity
- Responsibility to a larger good

### Collective Action

- Integration of knowledge, skills, and examined values to inform actions taken in concert with other people
- Moral discernment and behavior
- Navigation of political systems and processes, both formal and informal
- Public problem solving with diverse partners
- Compromise, civility, and mutual respect

**Figure 1. A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement from *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (2012), p. 4.**

This more expansive delineation of what civic learning and democratic engagement entail opens the door wide to every discipline. No longer is civic learning restricted to political science, history, or communication. Nor can any of those disciplines complacently prepare students for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world using 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptual disciplinary frameworks. This comprehensive and contemporary list invites each discipline to consider what civic outcomes are already embedded in their major's investigations and interpretive lenses, but also what should be included but is missing.

This framework also expands an earlier and more procedural understanding of education for democracy. Instead, it is now characterized more by probing questions than by certitudes. Democratic principles are understood to be contested. To understand why requires being informed by multiple and contrasting perspectives. Diversity is newly central to a contemporary framework, both in terms of how diversity has been defined in the past as well as the present. Interdependence globally and locally is a given as is the new emphasis on

investigating the global dimensions of local citizenship. Finally, this more contemporary framing asks that students study the comparative political movements for democratic social justice, both in the United States and beyond its borders, both historic and contemporary.

One of the most dramatic contrasts across the disciplinary clusters with AAC&U's McCormick project was the absence of attention in the arts and humanities to civic action as one component of civic learning. That was matched by the admitted absence of attention in STEM to attention to civic values. On the one hand, these striking differences in emphasis and outcomes suggest how important it is for students to hone their civic learning through multiple disciplinary venues in order to develop capabilities across all four dimensions. On the other hand, the revelation of the dramatic absence of one of these dimensions caused discomfort within both of those disciplinary clusters. Each began to consider how to redraw disciplinary expectations and pedagogies in order to embrace all four dimensions of civic learning and democratic engagement, even if there might logically be greater strengths in certain areas. Thus, using a civic lens as means of seeing one's discipline can ultimately reinvigorate how that discipline is understood and taught.

The second strategy for making civic learning more pervasive is revealed in the next chart that offers concrete descriptions of what a civic-minded academic institution might look like. A *Crucible Moment* describes four dimensions to look for:

- 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 lifelong practice.

## What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?

### **CIVIC ETHOS governing campus life**

The infusion of democratic values into the customs and habits of everyday practices, structures, and interactions; the defining character of the institution and those in it that emphasizes open-mindedness, civility, the worth of each person, ethical behaviors, and concern for the well-being of others; a spirit of public-mindedness that influences the goals of the institution and its engagement with local and global communities.

### **CIVIC LITERACY as a goal for every student**

The cultivation of foundational knowledge about fundamental principles and debates about democracy expressed over time, both within the United States and in other countries; familiarity with several key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements undertaken to achieve the full promise of democracy; the ability to think critically about complex issues and to seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences.

### **CIVIC INQUIRY integrated within the majors and general education**

The practice of inquiring about the civic dimensions and public consequences of a subject of study; the exploration of the impact of choices on different constituencies and entities, including the planet; the deliberate consideration of differing points of views; the ability to describe and analyze civic intellectual debates within one's major or areas of study.

### **CIVIC ACTION as lifelong practice**

The capacity and commitment both to participate constructively with diverse others and to work collectively to address common problems; the practice of working in a pluralistic society and world to improve the quality of people's lives and the sustainability of the planet; the ability to analyze systems in order to plan and engage in public action; the moral and political courage to take risks to achieve a greater public good.

**Figure 2. What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like? from *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (2012), p. 15.**

This formulation focuses not so much on a particular learning outcome as on everyday institutional practices that occur in and out of the classroom and combine with administrative policies and practices. This chart underscores what some of the effects of 21<sup>st</sup> century outcomes might be on institutional identity, climate, and practice. It also paints a picture of what it feels like to be a student, an employee, or a visitor on a given campus.

The third and final principal strategy for moving from partial to pervasive civic learning is captured in this chart below from *A Crucible Moment*. If this advice were followed, all students would graduate with robust civic knowledge gleaned over time and across multiple capacities. They would also have serial experiences in applying that knowledge in concert with others to address shared concerns about the public good.

### From Partial to Pervasive: Constructing More Advanced Levels of Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement in Higher Education

Partial foundation laid...	Civic learning is pervasive...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning is optional for some students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning is expected for all students, regardless of field or area of study</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning is a one-time experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning is infused across students' educational experiences over time in a developmental arc</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching critical thinking does not consider real-world contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching critical thinking also occurs in relation to issues of public significance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning is individually oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning also fosters collaboration with diverse people and groups</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning focuses on external engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning also asks students to reflect on their own social identity and location as well as those of others</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty in some disciplines and certificate programs raise civic questions in relation to their field</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty in all disciplines and certificate programs raise civic questions in relation to their field</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based scholarship is accepted in some departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based scholarship is positively viewed in all departments and influences the hiring and promotion of faculty</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning practices in the curriculum and cocurriculum are parallel but not integrated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic learning practices in the curriculum and cocurriculum are coordinated and connected through partnerships between academic and student affairs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement is one-directional, with colleges and universities providing expertise to the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement is reciprocal, with colleges/ universities and communities working together to identify assets and solve public problems</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission and vision statements do not explicitly address civic responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission and vision statements explicitly address civic responsibility</li> </ul>

Figure 3. From Partial to Pervasive from *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (2012), p. 43.

Of particular relevance to any commitment to infuse civic learning across all disciplines, the movement from partial to pervasive requires that “faculty in all disciplines and certificate programs raise civic questions in relation to their field.” *Civic Prompts* seeks to open up new mechanisms for doing that more routinely and more expansively within and across departments.

### III. Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines

*“Education for citizenship should not be crowding out the ‘real’ focus of the course; it should be a way to engage students in that work.”*

Citizenship Across the Curriculum

If those three strategies lead to increasing opportunities for civic learning and democratic engagement for students in general, what form *in particular* might it take within students’ chosen fields of specialization, whether at two-year or four-year colleges? With support from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Association of American Colleges and Universities turned to a group of national consultants who then paired with faculty members from seven two- and four-year institutions to tackle what that might mean within selected disciplinary clusters. One of the key recommendations to higher education in *A Crucible Moment* was to practice civic inquiry across all fields of study in order to, as the report says, “prevent civic learning and democratic engagement from being sidelined by contending forces that consider it discretionary” (31). One of the specific ways to do that is found in the report’s recommendation referred to earlier to “define within departments, programs, and disciplines the public purposes of their respective fields, the civic inquiries most urgent to explore, and the best way to infuse civic learning outcomes progressively across the major” (32). Another recommendation is to “identify expected levels of civic achievement within fields, and design creative ways for students to demonstrate cumulative proficiencies” (32).

An important volume, *Citizenship Across the Curriculum* (2010) by Michael B. Smith, Rebecca S. Nowacek, and Jeffrey L. Bernstein, represents some of the new approaches to civic learning across the disciplines. This study corrects the mistaken notion that only political science and history are disciplinary arenas for civic inquiries and civic action. In their foreword, distinguished scholars Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings capture the rich yet largely untapped potential of breaking out of disciplinary civic straitjackets. They write, “. . .when faculty from different disciplinary communities teach their fields wearing a civic lens, both the concept of citizenship and even the field itself (as taught and learned) are subject to change”(x).

Trying to understand what cultivating a civic lens actually entails within the disciplines, even one like political science that everyone assumes has all the angles figured out, can be a complicated matter. The American Political Science Association tackled the many issues head on when it published *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* (2013) for which Alison Rios, Millett McCartney, Elizabeth A. Bennion, and Dick Simpson served as editors of the 500 page book. Michael Brintnall, then the Executive Director of APSA, explains in the foreword, “There is broad agreement that civic engagement is a social responsibility, but it has become less certain whether it is a professional or disciplinary responsibility” (xi). He goes on

to clarify, “Political scientists have wrestled with the concerns that civic education and civic learning are distractions or digressions from our roles as scholars and teachers” (p. xii). The four sections of APSA’s book offer a template for other disciplinary associations to consider if they too decide education for democratic participation is indeed a disciplinary responsibility. The volume includes four sections: 1) higher education, civic engagement pedagogy, and political science education; 2) implementing civic engagement in the classroom; 3) incorporating civic engagement into the curriculum and beyond; and 4) assessing civic engagement objectives and outcomes. For more information, see <http://community.apsanet.org/TeachingCivicEngagement/Home/>.

AAC&U’s McCormick project was not just tackling one discipline, but all of them. We therefore created four disciplinary clusters: arts and humanities, social sciences, STEM, and business and pre-professional fields. Each cluster was led by a national consultant with expertise in these respective fields. The other informants for the project were faculty teaching in multiple disciplines and at varying levels as they experimented with how best to cultivate a civic sensibility in their students, not as an optional add-on, but as an integral part of developing a disciplinary lens for interpreting the world.

In this next section of *Civic Prompts*, we have constructed a process for faculty so they can unearth civic outcomes often buried beneath the surface of disciplinary soil. These questions were developed through this pilot McCormick Foundation project as it sought to make headway into this new frontier of inquiry. We have designed the questions so readers can make use of them either within or across departments on their own campus. For our part, AAC&U is eager to learn from the field of practice how the *Civic Prompts* might be amended, expanded, or refined. We invite you to offer feedback and send your comments to Caryn McTighe Musil at [musil@aacu.org](mailto:musil@aacu.org).

We are also interested in how different disciplines actually answer the Civic Prompts in the following section. We have some insights from faculty who participated in AAC&U’s McCormick-funded project, but we want to expand that number and disciplines by combining it with additional responses and recommendations grounded in the everyday application by an even more expansive field of practitioners. AAC&U would like to compile on our website a national set of civic practices that make civic learning and democratic engagement routine across the disciplines. We therefore invite you to share summaries of your findings with us at [musil@aacu.org](mailto:musil@aacu.org).

*Civic Prompts* will, we hope, initiate a robust set of campus conversations across the country. In the best case scenario, the cumulative result of these discussions will eventually lead to the groundwork for a rich national and global resource for faculty seeking to empower students to

become informed, responsible civic participants in their local, national, and global communities and in their workplaces.

During the course of the project, several important insights emerged about how to accelerate the rate at which civic learning and democratic engagement might become more commonplace within and across disciplines, specialized studies, and programs. First, it is important to identify civic opportunities everywhere they currently exist and to name public consequences and education for the public good even in standards and practices that may at first glance not be obvious. Sometimes simply using a civically rich example to illustrate a theory or concept might raise issues that students could grapple with and understand as public issues. Many practitioners recommended that faculty members figure out possible partnerships with different groups across campus, both within and outside of departments, to address critical community issues, issues that are enacted beyond the boundaries of the campus. There are also many opportunities on the campus itself to address what a democratically engaged and value-driven campus might adopt as everyday practices in governance, fair wages, and admissions policies to name just three examples. Finally, participants across all disciplinary clusters spoke of how many of their students were searching for ways to live meaningful lives, wrestle with big problems facing their generations, and contribute to making a more just world. In light of that quest and the civic mission of higher education in a democratic society, faculty members wanted to create an educational environment for students that put positive social change outcomes at the forefront of academic learning experiences.

What struck many faculty members across disciplinary affiliations at the AAC&U project meetings in Chicago was how infrequently they identified the civic dimensions of their subject matter to the students. Sometimes that was because as professors they had never named them, even when the material invited it. Other times, however, civic omissions were the consequence of strong disciplinary blinders that omitted them as a legitimate area to include. Because graduate schools focus on educating the professoriate-in-training to convey the content of their disciplines more narrowly, education for democracy was often written out of their disciplinary study. *Civic Prompts* has been created to insert it back into every discipline, every major, for every student.

Many faculty integrate civic learning and democratic engagement through the kinds of pedagogies they adopt in their courses. As the different disciplinary clusters in the AAC&U project discussed this issue, a wide range of pedagogical approaches were named by them as already being deployed in ways that accentuated civic insights, or else as having the potential to be used in a more intentional and transparent way in their future classes to better reveal to students the rich civic dimensions of a given subject of study. With the Arts and Humanities Cluster, for example, the faculty members named reflection papers, collaborative learning,

small group discussions, group projects, action projects, role playing, journals, portfolios, student presentations, oral histories, project-based learning, internships, and action research projects. For their part the Stem Cluster identified active learning, hands-on learning, problem-based and project-based learning, asking questions, gathering evidence, interpreting results, analysis and synthesis, case-based learning, field work, classroom response systems, demonstration, collaborative learning and teamwork, simulations and games, and lecture and discussion. Echoing some repeated pedagogies, the Social Sciences Cluster identified civic reflection, the Socratic method which sets a tone of respectful debate and discussion, oral histories, simulations, problem sets, internships, co-ops, and other structured volunteer opportunities, workshops, practice analysis, and hands-on experiential activities.

The Business and Pre-professional Cluster stood out in its list because it opted to identify pedagogies in which civic learning was embedded as one of the outcomes derived through the pedagogy. In their list they included problem-based learning in which students identify problems in the community to research and propose solutions for, case studies in which students get data and offer a diagnosis, internships and practicums linked to understanding a social or structural issue that also includes a reflective piece, multiple modes of evaluation, and a presentation at the end. Expanding their list, they also named community mapping, student-initiated capstone projects, and open classrooms with reciprocal engagement such as organizing opportunities for community members to make use of campus resources. They also spoke of the transformative possibilities of community-led courses, courses located in the community, multi-term experiences, and reverse classrooms in which community work was primary but supplemented by brief reporting periods in class and opportunities for coaching and further research.

AAC&U's national report *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007), created by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), cited seven principles of excellence for higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Three are particularly relevant to civic learning and democratic engagement in the disciplines. The first is **Engage the Big Questions**, which it recommends can be done if faculty members "teach through the curriculum to far-reaching issues—contemporary and enduring—in science and society, cultures and values, global interdependence, the changing economy, and human dignity and freedom" (6). The second of these principles especially relevant to *Civic Prompts* is **Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action**, which can be done by "prepar[ing] students for citizenship and work through engaged and guided learning on 'real-world' problems" (6). The third principle of excellence for college learning of value in this monograph's enterprise is **Foster Civic, Intercultural, and Ethical Learning**, by "emphasiz[ing] personal and social responsibility, in every field of study" (6).

Adopting these principles of excellence will help respond constructively to a society whose democratic edges are badly frayed. They will also advance the very knowledge base of each academic field of inquiry. What do students need to know from their major in order to meet their civic obligations at work and in their local and global communities? Answering these questions can redefine the subject of study, the methodologies used, and the ends to which knowledge is applied. These principles raise issues about the relationship between the individual good and the common good, ethical and moral decision making, and the way taking seriously the perspectives of others enhances and expands both understanding and empathy.

These are also capabilities needed in a diverse democracy like the United States. There is no more time to waste before deploying the power of a student's specialized study in college to formulate not only the knowledge he or she acquires, but the way each is able to develop capacities and commitments to participate with others to solve urgent public problems and to create more robust, humane, and democratic societies. This is a crucible moment, and faculty members can indeed shape not only college learning but democracy's future.

## IV. Civic Prompts to Develop a Disciplinary Civic Lens

*“The way we run our classrooms and the way we connect those classrooms to our communities can have a lot to say about whether our teaching and learning practices are advancing a more diverse, socially just, and democratic culture.”*

*José Z. Calderón, Race, Poverty, and Social Justice:  
Multidisciplinary Perspectives Through Service Learning*

The questions below are designed to be used within a single disciplinary department or program on your campus or across multiple departments and programs where some cross disciplinary comparisons and fertilizations might occur. One might also opt for orchestrating the conversation serially. That is, begin within a single department but plan to follow up with a gathering in which those departments that also used the Civic Prompts can discuss their findings and brainstorm how to make civic learning more commonplace across majors. To generate the most fruitful discussions, we encourage participants to resist thinking about the barriers to infusing civic learning across the disciplines and instead think creatively about what they might do if there were no rules or limits.

For our first disciplinary cluster meeting in our AAC&U project, we asked each participant to write a short civic bio in order to jump start the conversation. We then shared the civic bios with everyone both within and beyond each person’s disciplinary cluster group. We think doing the same for your campus departmental discussions would be a productive exercise before you gather to respond to the questions in the following Civic Prompts. The people at AAC&U’s Chicago meeting were faculty members who had already incorporated differing levels of civic learning and democratic engagement into their courses. Our directions simply asked participants to compose a short, two to three paragraph snapshot describing how they came to raise civic questions about public issues in their classes. Some questions we suggested they might elaborate on included: Why do you organize the study of your discipline this way? How did you come to such a point? And why in some cases do you opt to encourage students to be engaged in hands-on collaborative work with others to achieve shared public ends? How do your personal commitments intersect with your work?

The civic bio exercise would, however, also be a revealing exercise for faculty who may not yet have incorporated civic questions intentionally into their courses. By amending the questions slightly, one could invite faculty members to explore their own identity as an engaged citizen in their society, the kind of knowledge they need to do so responsibly and in an informed way, and then pose a query about where students might best learn how to do the same.

The Civic Prompts that follow are designed to be used in smaller group settings of eight to twelve people. The small number allows for richer exchanges through self-reflection, dyads, triads, and table work, but the size also insures there are opportunities for sharing key insights as a whole group. Very likely action items will flow from these investigations at a personal, departmental, and even possibly institutional level. It is helpful, then, to capture the essential content of the conversation so everyone can have sufficient time to reflect on and consider the unexpected discoveries and specific embodiments of civic learning and democratic engagement in a course as they take shape over time. Having some kind of record of the exchanges also allows the group to ask, so what? Does the conversation suggest the department as a whole as well as individual faculty within the department might want to make any changes in how the major is organized or its pedagogies and assignments adopted? Do the findings imply that more recognition should be given for the faculty whose scholarship is shaped by public engagement? If so, how?

## **CIVIC PROMPTS:**

**I. As you begin to think about fostering a civic sensibility within your discipline or program, examine carefully the learning capacities identified as a 21<sup>st</sup> century framework for civic learning and democratic engagement (see p. 5 above or p. 4 in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*). Which of these capabilities does your disciplinary domain especially embrace? Or put another way, which are associated as outcomes for your disciplinary domain?**

*Suggested exercise:*

*Give a copy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Civic Framework to each person in the group. You can decide to organize people together in similar disciplines or mix them together. Have each person circle the capacity that is a routine goal of their major or program and draw a line through ones that are considered irrelevant. Leave unmarked those that sometimes are sought but not regarded as essential.*

*Things to consider as you discuss the patterns that emerged within and across people and disciplines:*

- *Were you surprised at how many are associated with your discipline? How few? Or by the uneven emphasis across the four categories of knowledge, skills, values, and action?*
- *What emerged as striking differences in civic outcomes sought within subfields of your discipline or across different disciplines? Does it matter? What are the implications for the design of courses for students within your major?*
- *How might the learning capabilities that your disciplinary domain is deeply committed to suggest ways to frame a set of civic inquiries and actions that embed such learning easily for all students within your discipline?*
- *What missing civic elements should be attended to despite having been routinely seen as “none of my discipline’s concerns?” How might their inclusion alter the discipline?*

**II. What are some lines of civic inquiry especially amenable to your disciplinary domain?**

*Suggested exercise:* *Have each person in the group use a flip chart or a piece of paper to write a set of questions that flow from their disciplines or subfields. Then take time to view what others in the group wrote without commenting. Then begin to explore in open conversation the insights that the exercise generated, both by doing it individually and seeing what others wrote.*

Things to consider as you discuss findings:

- How difficult was it to create the questions that were called “civic lines of inquiry”? Is that what you would name them?
- Were you surprised by how many surfaced in your own courses? Or by the contrast across other subfields or majors? How did they or didn’t they echo each other? What makes them feel “natural”?
- How might some of these be a stretch for your disciplinary domain?
- What might be the effect of opening up a course or strategically inserting an opportunity for students to pose their own set of civic lines of inquiry into the course subject matter?

### **III. What are some big issues that are common to your disciplinary domain that lend themselves to civic inquiries and/or actions?**

Suggested activity: Have each person do a self-writing exercise as each considers what two or three recurring large issues were a focus of the last several courses they have taught. Circle ones with especially rich civic implications.

Things to consider as you review your choices:

- What were the issues? Did they differ across levels or subfields? How many of those issues were driven by the design of requirements for the major?
- In the especially rich civic implications that people named, were they taught or understood as civic issues that had broad public consequences? If not, what was preventing that framing?
- What various civic angles on the issues did you raise in your courses? With what responses from students?
- What additional issues might acquire greater prominence within your domain if civic inquiry were given priority?

### **IV. What are some civic pedagogies suited to your disciplinary domain?**

Suggested activity: In the previous chapter, faculty members across disciplines identified an expansive set of pedagogies that could be adopted for civic learning purposes. They should serve as a constructive stimulus for your discussion. However, in addition to those already named by the four disciplinary clusters in AAC&U’s project, many colleges are using what is commonly called high-impact practices which are listed in the box below. These are practices defined by George Kuh and the staff at the National Survey for Student Engagement based on survey data from thousands of students and campuses. With its

*mission of improving the quality of student learning, AAC&U has promoted these practices widely in its publications and conferences. The list also includes two other pedagogies cited in A Crucible Moment. Note that evidence suggests how powerful these pedagogies are in increasing student engagement, academic achievement, and likelihood of staying in school to graduate (see Finley and McNair cited below and in the references). The high-impact pedagogies contribute in even more effective ways when students engage in 4-6 of them, are exposed to them early in their academic careers and faculty intentionally and strategically position them along the full continuum of a student's academic career.*

### **Initial Twelve High-Impact Practices Highlighted in the George Kuh/ AAC&U Monograph**

**The *First Six* do not have civic outcomes unless deliberately orchestrated to do so:**

- First-year seminars
- Undergraduate research
- Writing intensive
- Common intellectual experience
- Capstone/Culminating project
- Internships

**The *Second Six* have inevitable civic outcomes that can be intensified**

- Service learning and Community-based learning
- Diversity
- Global
- Study Abroad
- Learning Communities
- Collaborative learning

**Two additional civic pedagogies cited in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future***

- Intergroup and Deliberative Dialogue
- Civic Problem-solving

See George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (AAC&U, 2008); Jayne E. Brownell and Lynn E. Swaner, *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality* (AAC&U, 2010); Ashley Finley and Tia McNair, *Assessing High-Impact Learning for Underserved Students* (AAC&U, 2013)

Things to consider from the list of high-impact practices, pedagogies identified by the disciplinary clusters, or other pedagogies you adopt in your courses:

- Which pedagogies dominated your department? Across which levels and which subfields and which disciplines?
- What were the consequences of designing civic dimensions in the pedagogies you used? What were the effects of not making that intentional?
- What other pedagogies not named as yet do you routinely use? Are they driven by your department's values and emphases? How?
- How have you or might you insert an element, question, exercise, or experiential component into a pedagogy that might not be innately civic? What disciplinary considerations restrict you from doing so?
- What one radical idea can you think of that you do not yet already use which would allow you to infuse civic learning and democratic engagement more routinely into your courses?

#### **V. What kinds of assignments generate a line of civic questioning or civic actions within the context of your disciplinary or interdisciplinary course?**

Suggested Exercise: Pause for a moment to jot down two or three assignments that you already include within some of your courses that have produced a set of civic opportunities for learning on the student's part.

Things to consider as you discuss your selections:

- Share with others in your disciplinary cluster the examples across your group and the insights you had drawing them up, both in terms of how deliberate you had been in deriving civic learning from them or how much you had overlooked that dimension of the students' learning.
- If you are in a larger mixed disciplinary group, move to sharing some key discoveries with others from different disciplines.
- Are there some assignments that currently are incorporated into your courses that could be given a civic twist? Which ones and how?
- How can the assignments help students deepen their understanding of the common good while also giving students more practice in democratic engagement through hands-on experiences?

**VI. What are some forms of civic action that are seen as appropriate to your disciplinary domain and which you could incorporate more intentionally in your courses at selected points and levels?**

*Suggested activity: Use a flipchart for your discipline or program and consider the earlier discussions of civic lines of inquiry, big issues to explore with civic consequences, and civic pedagogies. What forms of civic action suggested by that earlier discussion are logical ones to consider? Make a list of at least five potential collaborative, hands-on, experiential projects that might be adopted in one of your courses or as a culminating project for students majoring in your department?*

*Things to consider as you review your lists together:*

- *How do they fall in line with other forms of action common to your disciplinary domain?*
- *What potential civic actions will be a stretch? Which are utterly out of the question? Why?*
- *How might some of these civic action projects be regarded as signature or culminating projects for students and especially appropriate for gauging how much students have learned over the course of their studies?*

**VII. In what ways does your disciplinary society currently invest in civic learning and democratic engagement as a component of the disciplines and how else might it offer leadership and resources?**

While *Civic Prompts* is designed for faculty to use in their institutional settings or in a cluster of colleges as AAC&U did with the McCormick project in Chicago, it recognizes the power of disciplinary societies in influencing what a given major might look like on a college campus. Given that, we thought it especially important to stimulate faculty members to think about their disciplinary associations. Might they be a resource for civic innovations? Or could they be motivated to serve in that capacity?

*Things to consider about scholarly societies:*

- *Since many faculty turn to the intellectual authority of their regional and national disciplinary societies for trends and standards, how many are actually grappling with the responsibility for figuring out how to foster civic learning for diverse democracies and global cooperation? In what ways?*
- *Which disciplinary societies have established special task forces or topical areas within which civic inquiries easily reside? What might you initiate with others in your own disciplinary association?*

- *How many offer teaching and learning conferences within the larger disciplinary gatherings? Or host smaller gatherings where the civic dimensions of teaching within the major could be or are already being explored? Might yours do the same?*
- *Are there journals where such topics are discussed? Disciplinary websites with resources for teaching civic learning?*
- *What other resources exist beyond one's disciplinary society where scholars and teachers gather to explore these kinds of questions?*

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## About the Author

**Caryn McTighe Musil** is Senior Scholar and Director of Civic Learning and Democracy Initiatives at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Washington, DC, where she had earlier served as Senior Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Global Initiatives for fourteen years. She has been writing, speaking, and directing national projects about civic engagement, diversity, global learning, and democracy for the past three decades. Dr. McTighe Musil was the author of *A Crucible Moment: Civic Learning and Democracy's Future*, a national report that represents the collective wisdom of a broad constituency and was released at the White House. *A Crucible Moment* calls for action from across sectors in and out of higher education to advance civic learning and democratic engagement from grammar school to graduate school moving such education from niches to norms. During her 24 years at AAC&U, Dr. McTighe Musil has directed more than twenty national and international projects involving colleges and universities across the country and around the globe. Before that she was a faculty member for sixteen years. Dr. McTighe Musil received her B.A. from Duke University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in English from Northwestern University. In 2013 she was named as the recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Higher Education Award from NASPA.

## About *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*

*A Crucible Moment* evolved from a joint project with The Department of Education called "Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement" (2010-2011). The Department had selected Larry Braskamp of the Global Perspectives Inventory, Inc. and Caryn McTighe Musil of the Association of American Colleges and Universities to organize a series of public convenings to determine the state of education for engaged citizenship in higher education and to recommend what might advance the quality and pervasiveness of education for diverse democracies. The gatherings of multiple, deeply informed stakeholders in and out of the academy provided the research, advice, and insights for the final national report with its set of recommendations.

A National Task Force oversaw the project and vetted the final publication. Donald W. Harward, a member of the National Task Force and Director of Bringing Theory to Practice, shepherded grants from the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation and the S. Engelhard Center that enabled AAC&U to publish *A Crucible Moment*, making it broadly available for purchase in hard copy or for free as an online publication (see [www.aacu.org/crucible](http://www.aacu.org/crucible)).



## About AAC&U

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,300 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size. AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education and inclusive excellence at both the national and local levels, and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).



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