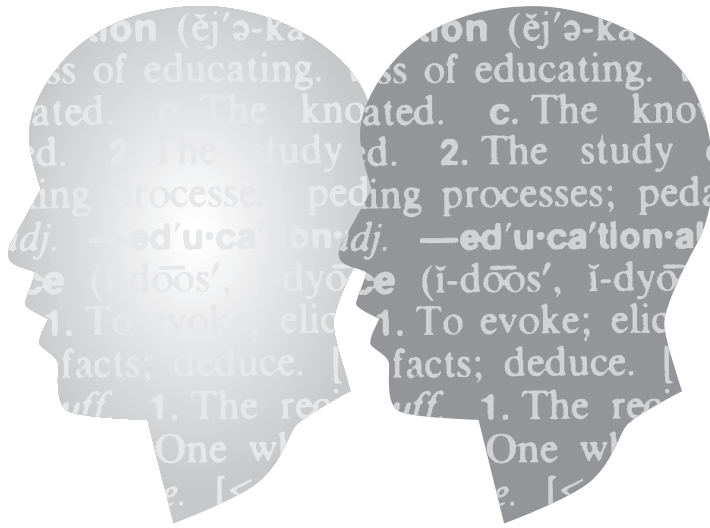


HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2009



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The *Higher Education Exchange* is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the *Higher Education Exchange* agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The *Higher Education Exchange* is part of a movement to strengthen higher education's democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the *Higher Education Exchange* publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.

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FOREWORD

By Deborah Witte

Why do we publish the *Higher Education Exchange*? Our mission statement declares that we are “part of a movement to strengthen higher education’s democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society.” We’ve often said the *Exchange* is a vehicle for faculty and administrators, as well as students, to share ideas and practices involving public scholarship initiatives. But the *Exchange* is also designed to “carry the work” that the Kettering Foundation is engaged in.

Kettering is a research foundation. This often confuses people who are mostly familiar with foundations as grantmakers. Rather than acting as a grantmaker, Kettering prefers to work in a collaborative mode with organizations and communities who share our impulses, concerns, and sensibilities about public life. Kettering’s research is mission driven and that mission question is, “What does it take for democracy to work as it should?” Kettering hypothesizes that democracy requires at least three things: citizens who can make sound judgments about how they want to live; a community of citizens who can deliberate and act together on the issues of problems that confront them; and institutions that can support the public work that citizens do.

Higher education is, of course, just one of many institutions that need to support the work of citizens. There are others—the public schools come to mind, as do media, both print and, increasingly, broadcast media. Philanthropy, medicine, and law are a few more to consider when we think about public institutions. Undoubtedly, there are others still.

Of every institution that has a role to play in public life we can ask this question: What are you doing to support and legitimate the work of citizens as they go about creating and building democracy? Unfortunately, Kettering has learned through our research that many institutions—and higher education is among them—do very little to support the work of citizens. Institutions can be extremely self-referential, often carving out a small, professionalized niche for themselves within the larger society. It’s no wonder the public rarely

thinks to turn to these institutions as partners in their public work, or that higher education, as a case in point, rarely seeks out the public.

Oftentimes in the course of our research, Kettering encounters a public that most professionals in higher education don't see. It has been argued in the pages of this journal that higher education often sees clients, not citizens, especially when talking about service. Higher education has little to say to the everyday problems of citizens. A recent study by the California Campus Compact found that, overwhelmingly, community partners want even more communication and collaboration with higher education than they are getting now. Community partners see themselves as coeducators of students. They value the relationships they have with higher education and want to build even stronger relationships to foster deeper knowledge of and appreciation for the public's work.

But all is not gloomy. There are always exceptions to the rule, thank goodness. Miami University's president, David Hodge, recently vowed, "The historic view of a student as a receiver of knowledge can now be replaced by a view of the student as a creator of knowledge." Can a similar sentiment about the larger public be far behind?

Some of the articles and essays in this volume are examples of these exceptions. Through this volume especially, we've presented a few narratives of experiences of citizens working alongside professionals in higher education. These stories are the stories of "outliers," if you will, who understand and appreciate citizens as cocreators of knowledge.

David Mathews, Kettering's president, in a recent KF Press volume, *A Different Kind of Politics*, edited by Derek Barker and David Brown, writes about the disconnect between the civic engagement movement in academe and the civic engagement movement in communities. In his aptly named essay, "Ships Passing in the Night," he asserts:

People with a democratic bent ... don't want to be informed, organized, or assisted as much as they want to be in charge of their lives ... Unfortunately, they often have difficulty finding institutions that understand their agenda. Non-governmental organizations ... are often more interested in demonstrating the impact of *their* programs than in facilitating self-determination and self-rule.

And so, in this volume, we begin with an essay by Noëlle McAfee, a contributor who is familiar to readers of *HEX*. She

reiterates Mathews' argument regarding the disconnect between higher education's sense of engagement and the public's sense of engagement, and suggests a way around the epistemological conundrum of "knowledge produced *for* a public rather than *by* a public." Her solution may rouse many arguments, but it is intriguing, nonetheless.

An interview with Matt Leighninger, executive director of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, follows. He talks with *HEX* coeditor David Brown about the need for professionals of all stripes to value community. He suggests, "We need certain aspects of professionalization ... but we need to retain some antiprofessional qualities as well." The Consortium has just launched the Democracy Helpline, an online resource that showcases democratic governance stories with a community focus. There is a deep reciprocity between the community and professionals, he asserts, and both have expertise that is needed.

In the next article, Matt McKinney shares the work of the University of Montana's Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI). The institute, he writes, "helps citizens and officials build livable communities, vibrant economies, and healthy landscapes through inclusive, informed, and deliberative public processes." The institute offers a graduate-level natural resource and conflict resolution certificate program; conducts applied research on natural resource and environmental policy; and of most interest to the readers of this journal, facilitates convenings of citizens and officials struggling with tough natural resource and environmental issues. His chart of "A Tale of Two Cultures" suggests both academic and policy epistemologies at play, with neither being citizen-centered. Bridging this divide remains the work of the PPRI.

The piece that follows is an interview by David Brown with Deborah Wadsworth, a trustee of Bennington College. Wadsworth shares her "500-yard" view of trusteeship and its meaning for liberal arts institutions. According to Wadsworth, too many liberal arts colleges "have fallen prey to society's focus on individual achievement and personal gain at the expense of the common good." As a Bennington trustee, she has taken an active part in the college's effort to reorient its liberal education "so the public good, rather than self-interest, becomes a primary objective."

The final essay, by Denise Dowling at the University of Montana, looks at the ever-evolving role of higher education

through the prism of journalism. She suggests journalism is a discipline that “requires the public” and asks how the university can relate to the different knowledge a community brings to the examination of an issue. The story of her students and the Footbridge Forums is one of initial failure, yet ultimate success, as together both teachers and students struggle to connect their learning to the assets of the community.

As always, we include a book review. Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* is a treatment of “the power of technologically enabled social interaction in an era of Web 2.0,” writes Dana Walker, the reviewer. Previous barriers to group communication and interaction have all but disappeared with the advent of the Internet. As a result, citizens are using technology today to share, cooperate, organize, and act collectively.

All together, we hope these pieces contribute to the mounting evidence of higher education as one institution that is beginning to embrace its role—granted in small ways—in service to citizen self-rule.

David Mathews, in his Afterword, offers his take on what this volume of essays and articles means for higher education. Always provocative, and never pedestrian, he shares his prescription for a renewed relationship between higher education and the public.

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP OR HOW TO ASSIST IN THE AUTOPOIESIS OF POLITICAL COMMUNITIES

By Noëlle McAfee

“Political talk is not talk about the world; it is talk that makes and remakes the world.”

—Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984, p. 177)

Before he died, the eminent public journalist, Cole Campbell—who would have hated to have been called “eminent”—posed a central question: what does the public need to know in order to govern itself? Or in other words, what does the public need to know in order to decide well, together, what to do? That’s a question that any journalist who hopes to work in a truly democratic spirit ought to heed. It’s a question that any public scholar should heed as well. A public scholar would think that scholarship is done not just for its own sake but for the public’s sake. It seems appropriate to think that public scholarship is scholarship that serves a public purpose, just as public journalism is journalism that serves the public. But the trouble with the prospect of professionals (read scholars, journalists, and other “expert” experts) providing the public with the knowledge it needs is that to produce knowledge *for* a public has a built-in, antidemocratic spirit. To be democratic, one should think that a public can produce the knowledge it needs for itself and by itself, thank you very much.

Liberal democracy—and by liberal I mean the sort of philosophy that John Locke offered—provided a slick way around this problem. The modern philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries managed to *deduce* knowledge. They began with what they took to be self-evident, and from that deduced what ought to be. If it is self-evident that human beings have inalienable rights, including the right to be let alone, then a political structure ought to be one that preserves these rights. To begin with “self-evident truths” is to begin with what philosophers call foundations, meaning something rock solid enough

upon which to build an unshakable structure. If the foundations, and what followed from them, were self-evident and logically sound, it doesn't matter whether the public or a professional articulates the knowledge; it was there waiting to be articulated. It will serve the public fine, no matter who serves it up.

The problem with this view is that, alas, there may be no self-evident truths. Deduction may be the wrong way to ascertain what to do. And if truths are anything but self-evident, and ways of knowing are otherwise than deduction, then democratic knowing has to be revisited. In this essay, I follow this line of thought to see what its implications are for public scholarship.

Knowledge in politics has yet to undergo the kind of revolution that knowledge in science did, starting a few hundred years ago. The scientific revolution of the early modern era moved away from the old Aristotelian thinking that posited things like this: a ball moves from point A to point B because it has an internal principle of movement toward A—an “entelechy” or internal purpose or end. Because of this internal principle, it moves. Science threw off this Aristotelian thinking, which was based upon dubious metaphysical notions about the nature of things, and instead looked for knowledge of a different sort; some-



thing more like an understanding of the various forces that simultaneously came to bear on the ball, moving it from A to B. Instead of identifying the supposed “essence” of a thing and then deducing what its right actions would be, after the scientific revolution scientists simply tried to make generalizations based upon what they observed. These days, once a scientist thinks she has hit upon a good generalization, she makes that her hypothesis—one that will serve as a “good enough” explanation until a better one comes along. In science, a hypothesis should be refutable—that is, subject to being falsified by experience and experiment. It can't stand as some kind of immutable truth independent from experience. Good scientists remain humble and ready to chuck everything they know if experience and experiments warrant something else to be the case.

But the dominant view of political knowledge is still stuck in the dark ages. Like Aristotelian science, it begins with quasi-metaphysical notions, namely about the nature of people, and finds in them internal principles that are best fulfilled in certain kinds of political arrangements. The widespread notion of political human nature, at least in the West, is that people are essentially or ideally independent, autonomous, rights-bearing folks who prefer to be left alone as much as possible to

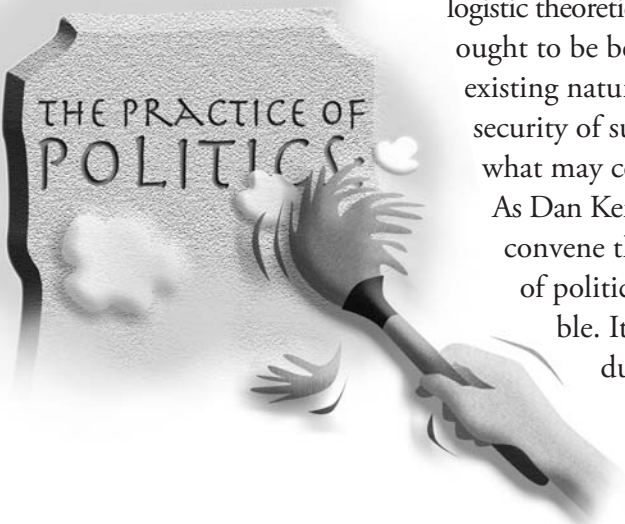
The practice of politics is to look for what is possible.

pursue their own private conceptions of the good life. Based upon this “premise,” the political theorist imagines an ideal society that respects individual rights and orders things so that people can be left to their private pursuits: liberal, representative democracy of the sort that we have tried to make work in the United States and western Europe. As Benjamin Barber discussed twenty-five years ago in his groundbreaking book, *Strong Democracy*, such premises about human nature and the conclusions they seem to entail—which generally lead to very thin democracies—are rooted in a quest for certainty, and fail to appreciate that politics is a forward-looking enterprise of addressing and deciding questions like “what should we do?” and “what kind of people do we want to be?” Such questions have no set answer. In fact, it is because their answers are indeterminate that we need to see political knowledge as something altogether different from the Aristotelian search for certainty based on foundations and given ends.

Where an Aristotelian object was born with an end in place—one’s purpose and meaning were given in advance—knowledge could be gotten by metaphysical introspection. But we moderns are generally right to resist the assumption that objects have internal purposes; so it is odd that we presume that people have a specific nature, and hence that a certain form of liberal, representative democracy is therefore the best form of government.

It is also odd to invoke syllogistic thinking (if A, then B) to think about politics. This kind of thinking looks for unassailable and self-evident assertions that can serve as premises or bedrocks for further claims. If we are atomistic individuals with innate rights and freedoms, then the syllogistic theoretician says it follows that political institu-

tions should be arranged such that we can live in harmony and keep our liberties. But the syllogistic theoretician remains mute about what ought to be beyond our supposed already existing nature. This thinking opts for the security of supposed certainty, rather than what may come with a new imagination. As Dan Kemmis said in a meeting I helped convene this past summer, the practice of politics is to look for what is possible. It certainly is not a matter of dusting off what is written in stone. Metaphysical thinking won’t help us get there.





A revolution in our thinking is called for, but not just from the metaphysical to the laboratory. I invoke the modern scientific method because it is helpful in realizing that the experimental attitude moves toward knowledge without ever having to invoke certainty.

A hypothesis is just the current best answer, one ready to be supplanted by a better one.

Yet, the experimental attitude still begins with the idea that there is a truth waiting to be discovered, even if it is modest about our ability to get to it. Given that

politics, as the art of the possible, is about deciding what ought to be and what kinds of people we want to be, a better analogy might be that of the science or art of invention.

In political deliberations, in deciding what we want to do, in political action for change, we are forging new identities. This is a kind of *autopoiesis*, as Ramon Daubon reminded the group at that same meeting. *Autopoiesis* is the capacity of a system—a cell, an organization, or a community—to define or make itself. We can consider this a process of political self-invention. In that sense, any answer to a political question about what is possible or what we should do is a process of self-invention for the political community involved in the asking. In a post-metaphysical world where the essence of things isn't given in advance, how do we know what the right answer is? When there isn't any "truth" of the matter waiting to be dusted off, how do we know how to answer? This is the yawning abyss of the current era. If there is no "getting it right," if there is no antecedent truth of the matter, how shall we proceed? How do we know in what form we should invent ourselves?

I mentioned a meeting this past summer. It was a conference that Claire Snyder and I organized at George Mason University called "Beyond the Academy: Engaging Public Life." We put out a call for papers on public scholarship, and the end result was a packed two days of panels discussing the engaged university, public humanities, deliberation, public policies, and engaged communities, along with a keynote address by Daniel Kemmis and a commentary by David Mathews. This was hardly the first conference on public

Autopoiesis is the capacity of a community to define or make itself.

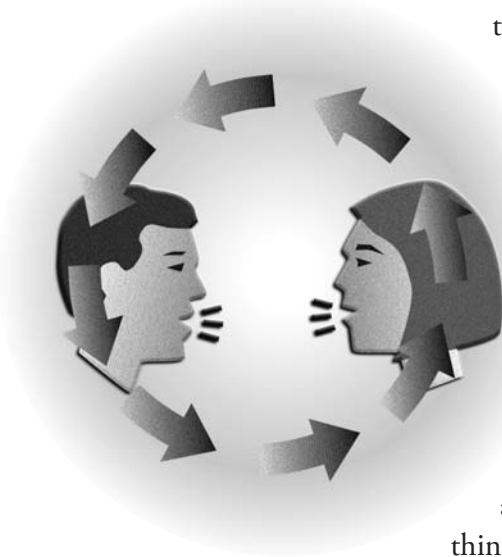
scholarship and it will surely not be the last. *Public scholarship* has become a term of art invoked in discussions ranging from how the tenure and promotion process should value scholarship that ventures beyond the academy to how academics should understand their own profession and evaluate each others' work.

I find that these conversations often go round in circles, and at the end of a few hours we still know little more than we did when we started. Our conference last summer got a little bit further because we tried to put the public scholarship discussion into a larger context. Dan Kemmis addressed how this type of scholarship has shaped his own work as a mayor and policymaker, and David Mathews juxtaposed the public scholarship movement against the civic engagement movement. The papers themselves also pointed to the larger context in which public scholarship arises, and it is in these sets of relationships that I think we can better understand what this new creature of academic life should be.

As David Mathews noted, public scholarship is one of many groundswells of civic engagement. But public scholarship often seems to be a world removed from the engagement of citizens in places like the Gulf Coast who are trying to rebuild their communities in a way that resonates with publicly-generated ideas of how things should be. In those communities, people were not saying they wanted to be served or organized; no matter how friendly the helper, they wanted to organize themselves.

The civic engagement movement in higher education is still caught up in the role of helper and service provider, whether in the work of service learning, in community outreach, or in public scholarship. If public scholarship is simply scholarship that serves a public, then it is a disservice to a public that wants to help itself—that is interested in *autopoiesis*. Public scholarship remains largely in the “helper” mode when it is mired in the dominant model of politics, where citizens are largely understood in relation to the state: as voter, taxpayer, consumer, watchdog, protester, or recipient of services. In focusing on citizens' relationship to the state, the dominant model fails to see the power of citizens' relationships to

Public scholarship often seems to be a world removed from the engagement of citizens.



In focusing on citizens' relationship to the state, the dominant model fails to see the power of citizens' relationships to each other.

each other. Yes, scholars and theorists have noted the power of civil society, but they often take it to be a social or cultural space, not a political one. The rise of civil society is often seen as a social phenomenon absent anything to do with power—that is, the ability to *do*. This model renders invisible the work of citizens trying to help themselves.

In his closing remarks, Mathews made another point that is a good starting point for us now. He noted an epistemological barrier:

I've been struck by how much the rational model of politics depends on an epistemology that denies the importance of the knowledge that people create together by their interactions as they try to decide what to do in that crucible of not knowing what to do, not having any ingredient, but trying deliberately to arrive at a choice.

Mathews' final remark brought the conference back to the abyss of the current era, where there is no "getting it right," there are no tried-and-true ingredients for how to forge a future together.

In chapter eight of his book, *Strong Democracy*, Benjamin Barber takes us to the edge of the abyss and then builds a bridge right over it. Drawing on John Dewey's and Charles Peirce's thinking,

Barber satirizes the theorists who could never travel from point

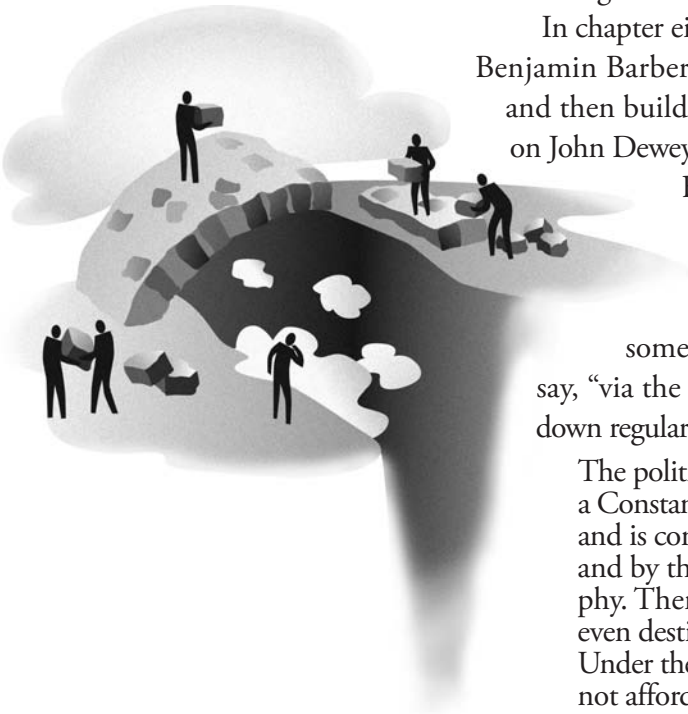
A to B—imagine from Boston to Constantinople —without

some definite and invariable coordinates,

say, "via the North Pole, in order to 'come down regularly upon a meridian' (p.165)."

The political journey, which may lack even a Constantinople, begins in a given present and is conditioned by a contingent history and by the contours of a changing geography. There are no fixed coordinates and even destinations may have to be invented. Under the circumstances, the citizen cannot afford to suspend his opinions. Rather, he must seek to justify and to transform them while living amid competing others who are at once both potential supporters and potential adversaries. (p.165)

Engaging in politics is a matter of deliberation, choice, and ultimately invention. It's a matter of imagining a possibility and then making that possibility into a fact.



The political work of deliberation is, at its core, a matter of self-making.

In the end, politics is a matter of deciding what to do. A political discussion that involves mere opinionating and asserting does not become political until the participants take it upon themselves to imagine and consider various options, and then to do the work of choosing one course of action rather than another. “Political knowledge is made in a context of history and experience and it is meant to be applied to a future realm of common action,” Barber writes. “It answers such questions as ‘What shall we do?’ and ‘How shall we reconcile our differences?’ and ‘How can we conduct ourselves as a just community?’ To such questions there are no ‘true’ or ‘false’ answers, no correct or incorrect positions. There are only alternative visions for communal acceptance (p.169).”

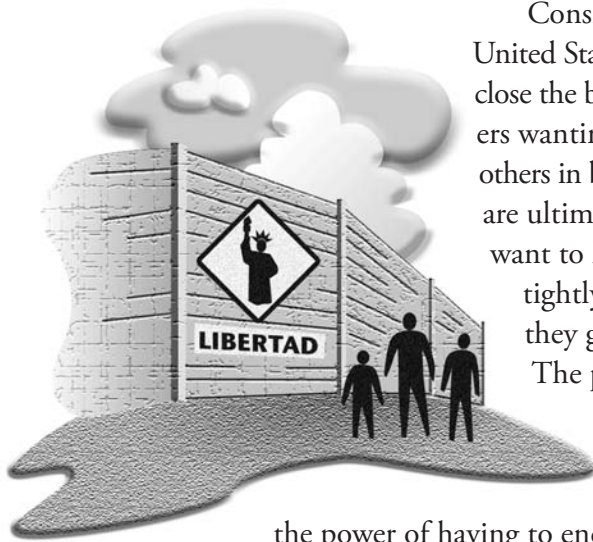
Any choice is a forking of the roads, as Dewey put it. When we go one way rather than the other, we *become* one way rather than another. It is in this sense that deliberation is a making of oneself, an autopoiesis. Through political deliberation, choice, and action, we become new beings, both as individuals and as peoples.

Consider the debate that is going on in the United States over immigration, with some wanting to close the borders, round up and deport “illegals,” others wanting to do the opposite, and all the others in between. In deciding what to do, deliberators are ultimately deciding what kind of country they want to have: open, generous, welcoming? closed, tightly-knit, loyal? In their choosing, however they go about it, they are *making* themselves.

The political work of deliberation is, at its core, a matter of self-making.

There may be no fixed coordinates in making these choices, but there is the power of having to encounter the other deliberators in the room. The deliberative process creates a public knowledge that, although it may lack a foundation, is tested through the back and forth of conversation. In their deliberative discussion, communities don’t “discover” what is true; they fashion what is true. The result is not willy nilly. It is something that works or is true because it resulted from the community discussion. Not everything will work—only what is workable will.

I began this essay with the conundrum that truly democratic public scholarship seems indefensible insofar as any knowledge produced *for* a public rather than *by* a public revokes the democratic



In any given field of life, any one of us is an expert, whether in cultivating stem cells or mending clothes.

hope that people can rule themselves by themselves. A way around this conundrum is to dissolve the dichotomy between publics and experts. In any given field of life, any one of us is an expert, whether in cultivating stem cells or mending clothes. I have always been struck by how any given circle of people tends to smugly believe that it has a special kind of knowledge that the great unwashed lack. When I am in the midst of academic philosophers, I detect that air. But that air is also present when I am in the midst of journalists, philanthropists, artists, scientists, natural childbirth advocates, evangelists, or modern architecture enthusiasts. We all feel a bit special, as we should. Life experience and interest create extraordinary knowledge. We all carry a bit of knowledge that others lack. We are all expert. And so this thing we call a *public* is a kind of republic of experts, a multitude of citizens experienced and expert in numerous walks of life.

What follows from this may be a bit deflating for the public scholar. Being an academic, a professor, a scholar, or a researcher is certainly exalted; it does, indeed, tend to make one eminent. But just as Cole Campbell would have shrugged off this label of eminence, so should we. I would like to suggest that anyone who considers herself a “citizen” and takes this title seriously as title to help shape the public world, would hope that her work would be part of this project, whether that work is mending clothes or cultivating stem cells.

The project of deciding what kind of people we want to be is hard to discern, much less to know who is part of it and whose input is of greatest import. As Dan Yankelovich noted in his work on coming to public judgment, the project goes on across vast fields of life, from water cooler discussions at the office to exchanges at the coffee shop, the dinner table, the taxicab, and the PTA meeting. In all kinds of informal and formal settings, we make choices together about what we should do—choices that draw on the knowledge we create in these settings about what is right and just and seemly. At their best, these conversations are informed by a multitude of perspectives, from those of the first-generation immigrant who empties the trash and vacuums your office after hours to the Shakespearean scholar who knows a thing or two about love and betrayal.

Public scholarship needs to be seen in this light. Just as it might be hard for the woman who cleans your office to know how her work contributes to public life, it can be equally difficult for

the Shakespearean scholar to know.

The problem is that often our frame is too narrow—I do this work to make a living, or I do this work to provide a novel reading of a famous but dead genius writer. But if we broaden our frame, the public import of our work can seep in, and I think this is often the case for people in their daily work:

“I empty this trash can to make a living and to make this office function better, and perhaps to make the world flourish a little better in a way that will help not only you and yours but me and mine, maybe us all”; “I reinterpret this text because I think this new interpretation provides a better opening for exploring the human condition and might even help my students lead better lives.”

Where the scholar, however public, might bristle at being cast alongside the woman who cleans offices, the ideal of isonomy calls for a change of heart and mind. As isonomous citizens, we are all, from all walks of life, equal in the project of autopoiesis.

Nietzsche is infamous for his criticism of democracy. He thought that democracy called for a herd mentality, that the ideal of equality would diminish everyone to the lowest common denominator. I think he was wrong, just as the scholar who might bristle at the account I am giving is wrong. Isonomy doesn't mean that we should gravitate to what is common. It means that we should appreciate that what is different in each of us can make distinct and important contributions to a common project. What the Shakespearean scholar knows about love and betrayal can be a vital contribution to public deliberation, just as the cleaning woman's experience and knowledge provides a vital perspective on what is right and just.

If we are to make and remake our world democratically, we all need to have an equal, and yet still distinct and special role in that project.



*We are all
equal in the
project of
autopoiesis.*

CITIZEN-CENTERED DEMOCRACY

An Interview with Matt Leighninger

David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with Matt Leighninger, executive director of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, senior associate of Everyday Democracy, and the author of The Next Form of Democracy (Vanderbilt University, 2006).

Brown: In the Foreword of your book, Bill Bradley says “public life is too important to be left solely to professionals,” and you discovered that both bottom-uppers and top-downers “are experiencing the shortcomings of expert rule.” Let’s start off with our “professional” problem. Why do we find ourselves in such a hole?

Leighninger: I think the mindset that we’ve had since the Progressive Era—that public problems are best solved through the expertise of public officials and public employees—is still very powerful. It is no longer an appropriate mindset for a number of reasons: the problems we face are more complex; ordinary citizens offer greater problem-solving capacity than ever before; and ordinary citizens are more willing and able to obstruct the experts (which can be a good or a bad thing, depending on the situation and one’s point of view) than ever before.

But even when officials and citizens recognize the need to change this mindset, operating differently isn’t so easy. Governments are cast from the “expert rule” mold—they are divided into departments for different issue areas, where practitioners working on that issue develop solutions in isolation from other departments and from the public as a whole. The farther up you go from local to federal, the narrower and more numerous the silos become.

What works best for democratic governance is to go where the citizens are and center the discussions around their needs and interests. But the policymaking process is centered on the needs and interests of policymakers, and the day-to-day work of solving public problems is centered on the needs and interests of the professionals. We continually try to bring citizens into arenas that just aren’t set up for them, that don’t give them much latitude for expression or action, that don’t honor their capacities or contributions, that are dominated by impenetrable

jargon and procedure, that make it hard to see the connections between issues, and that don't help them connect the policy debate to their own day-to-day experiences.

Brown: Is, then, the “professionalization of the civic field” a good thing?

Leighninger: Professionalization is both promising and problematic for us. Right now, there are virtually no barriers to entry in this field—it seems like all you need to set up shop as an expert on democracy is some free time and a Web site! There's a sort of excitement to that, and it may encourage various kinds of innovation, but at the same time it makes it very difficult for the prospective employers (public managers and other kinds of leaders who need help working more intensively with citizens) to find the right prospective employees (either job candidates for permanent positions, or nonprofits and consultants for temporary projects) who have the right skills and experiences to be effective.

We need certain aspects of professionalization: a more unified sense of the main principles that undergird the field; stronger degree programs (in disciplines like public administration) that prepare students to engage citizens more productively; and greater awareness of the main organizations, models, and techniques. But we need to retain some antiprofessional qualities as well: the sense that at least some of the basic skills you need to do this work can be learned fairly quickly by committed amateurs without formal training; a shared understanding that your mindset and attitude toward citizens is at least as important as the skills and experiences you bring to the job; and the flexibility to continue adapting models, methods, and principles, so that shared learning is one of the most prized tenets of the field.

Brown: So it isn't that “professionals” *per se* are the problem, but how they are educated in graduate school or even as undergraduates?

Leighninger: How professionals are educated is important, yes, but we also need the organizations and networks in the field to play a stronger role in upholding the basic principles, getting beyond the “turfiness” about our models and methods, and taking part in shared learning.

Brown: You have said, “Citizens may have less time for public life, but they bring more knowledge and skills to the table.” Doesn't the lack of *time* mean that many of their contributions will be fitful and not sustained?

It seems like all you need to set up shop as an expert on democracy is some free time and a Web site!

Leighninger: Yes, the lack of time means that citizens are choosier than ever about what they get involved in. When the energy is high, or the issue is controversial, or there seems to be a strong possibility for change, they will take part, but when those factors subside, they will stop participating unless other benefits are worked into the design of the process. The vast majority of the projects in this field, successful though they often are, have been temporary efforts. One of the mistakes we make is to think of this work as solely political; we don't build in enough of the social and cultural incentives that keep people coming back for more. In addition to

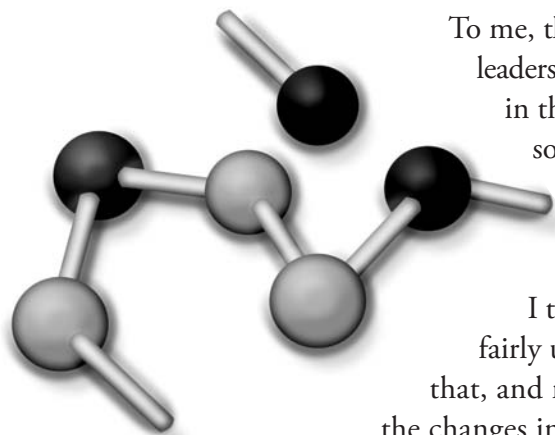


the desire to affect an issue they care about or an interest in public affairs, generally people are motivated by the desire to see their friends, share their experiences, enjoy food and music, show off the accomplishments of their children, and feel a part of the community.

Brown: Yes, I've often thought that people come together looking for answers, but more importantly, they find each other. What particular knowledge and skills do citizens bring which are any different than in times past?

Leighninger: I think it is safe to say that citizens today have higher levels of education, greater technical skills in a variety of areas, and also a different (less reticent) attitude towards all kinds of authority. In some of the projects I've seen, people have come out of the woodwork to craft marketing surveys, develop financing plans, create Web sites, design buildings, conduct environmental assessments, and raise large amounts of money—and not just in the wealthiest, supposedly most asset-rich neighborhoods or communities, either. Obviously another key variable here is the Internet, which in a very short period of time has become an enormous resource for people who want to gain technical knowledge quickly; gather rhetorical ammunition for opposing a particular policy or decision; make their views known to public officials and other decision makers; raise money; raise awareness of a particular cause or decision; and connect with other people who can help them.

Brown: It seems that social movements have a life span and lose their energy or focus, in part, from their successes. Isn't this unavoidable?



Leighninger: Two points here: one, I don't think that the rise of democratic governance really qualifies as a movement. To me, that word implies a lot more unity—shared leaders, shared language—than we currently have in the field. These deliberative, participatory sorts of civic experiments are emerging in a much more atomized way, initiated by many different kinds of leaders in many different places on many different issues. I think the trends pushing these efforts are fairly universal, but most people don't recognize that, and most of the leaders who are pioneering the changes in local democracy are still disconnected from one another.

Although it may not be a movement, democratic governance certainly is moving, and so my second point is that I think it can indeed translate into more permanent kinds of changes. To do that will require more serious thinking about institutional design than we've been able to do so far. One thing that has always surprised me—and it probably shouldn't have—is the difficulty of moving from successful temporary efforts to long-term structural change. I often remember a line from Lawrence Goodwyn's *The Populist Moment* in which he says, "Cultures are overwhelmingly difficult to change." Well, in the context of one of these democratic governance projects—a particular issue during a short period of time—it seems to me that the culture changes pretty quickly. Over and over again, I've heard people say some variation of, "Wow, that worked well. Let's make this the way our community does its business on a regular basis." But even when this feeling is very widespread, and all kinds of visible and not-so-visible changes have occurred as a result of the project, they rarely get to the point where they can transform the institutions and laws that undergird politics as usual.

Brown: Why is that?

Leighninger: There is a tendency of people who lived through the movements of the 1960s to shy away from talk about institutions. There is such a discomfort with authority among some Baby Boomers that establishing any kind of authority over anything seems hard for them to think about! I agree that institutionalizing democracy has always been a very difficult proposition. Generally, what has happened is that these democratic, participatory movements

Institutionalizing democracy has always been a very difficult proposition.

create reforms that are republican, rights-based, and not very participatory at all. But we need to keep trying, and I think we know more about democratic process—perhaps the key to institutional change—than ever before.

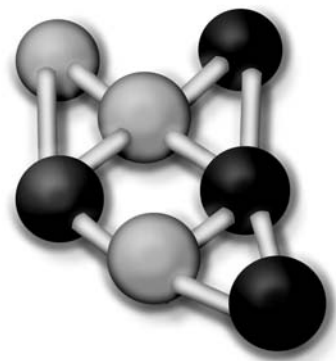
Brown: In your view, what elements of the “democratic process” can help sustain participatory movements?

Leighninger: I think we know the following:

- how to recruit large, diverse numbers of people, so that we can assemble a diverse critical mass of citizens to tackle a particular issue;
- how to sustain that involvement over time by building in a range of incentives for people to be involved;
- how to structure meetings so that they are deliberative, participatory, and enjoyable (in addition to being decisive and efficient); and
- how to apply lots of different problem-solving capacities, including the time and effort of ordinary people to a particular issue or problem.

Brown: Could you say more about who some of the “we” are who have the know-how you’ve just summarized?

Leighninger: Good point. I sometimes assume that this strategic knowledge is more widespread than it actually is. At this point, I think the main practitioner organizations in the field—the Kettering Foundation, Everyday Democracy, AmericaSpeaks, Public Agenda, National Civic League, and so on—have a great deal of expertise in the four elements I cited above. Many of these groups are active in the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, the group I direct, which has been a laboratory and a conduit for some of this learning. Networks like the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation and the International Association for Public Participation have been instrumental in helping solo practitioners grapple with these concepts. There are also many local leaders—elected officials, school administrators, community organizers, and so on—who have accumulated their own expertise and experience with these four strategies. Some of the membership associations that represent and convene local leaders, like the National League of Cities, International City/County Managers Association, League of Women Voters, NeighborWorks America, National School Public Relations Association, and National School Boards Association, are also doing a terrific job spreading these ideas and helping their members connect with one another around these issues. But there is still a lot of work to



be done to communicate this kind of process knowledge. So many of the people who are trying to engage citizens more productively don't even know that there are organizations, resources, and stories out there that can help them.

Brown: In your field work, what were some of the findings that most surprised you?

Leighninger: A recent surprise for me was the extent to which the work we do in the U.S. is similar to the democratic governance work now happening in the Global South. For years, the field has looked to Europe for great examples of how to involve citizens. It is true that over there they have a much stronger sense that part of the role of government is to consult with citizens. But they seem to have no sense of "citizens as problem solvers" in their own right. The welfare-state assumption that government is the only problem solver is still very pervasive there, which limits the potential of what they do with public engagement. In the Global South, on the other hand, there is not that assumption that government is the only problem solver, not only because of a lack of resources, but also because of corruption in government. And so their work to engage citizens, like the U.S. work, is more likely to be initiated by groups outside government

and more likely to tap into all the skills, talents, ideas, and commitment that citizens possess.

Brown: That's very interesting—something like "necessity being the mother of invention." Let me go on to another challenge. In your book, you speak of those who "share governance" as "sailors without compass or map, trying to reach a distant shore." What exactly is that

"distant shore," or to put it another way, if their passage is not charted but only emerges as they sail on, how will they know where they are headed?

Leighninger: My book is probably mistitled because it is likely there will be many different "next forms" of democracy, not just one. Different communities will come up with different frameworks for the relationship between citizens and government. But the question of how they know where they are headed, and (perhaps more importantly) how they know they are making progress,

It is likely there will be many different "next forms" of democracy, not just one.



*This is not all
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Nirvana.*

is a major challenge for the field. Right now, in most instances, communities and public agencies fail to measure how they are doing with public participation. We need systems that will help people track the quantitative kinds of information—how many people participated, how diverse and representative they were—along with more qualitative kinds of data—what did the participants and the decision makers think of the process, what kinds of tangible changes resulted, and so on. This kind of tracking and measuring ought to be easier now, with all the online technology we have at our disposal, but I haven't yet seen an online system that does all this. Without these kinds of information loops, it is harder for communities to figure out where they are going and how they might get there faster.

Brown: You concede early on in your book that you are imposing a framework on your empirical studies, a framework that participants may not actually see. Does your framework then assume too much? Is it possible that “the next form of democracy” just may not come about?

Leighninger: Yes, I am a biased observer in that so much of my time has been spent in settings where people are trying to change local democracy (though they seldom think about it that way; usually they are just trying to make an impact on an issue and see public engagement as a means to that end). It seems like these kinds of efforts are proliferating more and more, in all kinds of places on all kinds of issues, but I have no idea whether this kind of experimentation is happening in ten percent of all communities, or one percent, or one-tenth of a percent. I would agree that in most places, on most issues, most of the time, the same old politics predominates.

However, it seems to me (and here I consider myself a somewhat less biased source) that the trends that are fueling this experimentation are pretty universal and unlikely to change anytime soon. Rising levels of education, new attitudes about the power and privileges of the individual in relation to government, the accessibility and sophistication of the Internet—these are all long-term “up” arrows that are probably just going to keep going up. This is not all sweetness and light, a steady evolutionary progress toward Nirvana. In fact, especially in the short term, these trends cause all kinds of angst, frustration, and conflict (hence all the civic experimentation, which is probably driven by the need to avoid the bad stuff more than the desire to tap into the good stuff). But overall, I think these are positive changes and fairly universal ones. Regardless of whether

they excite you or scare you, if you are in any kind of leadership position you will have to deal with them in some way.

Brown: In my HEX 2008 piece, “The Journey of a ‘Recovering Professional,’” I argue that “a cultural change is possible, led by women prepared to reject or modify the professional mindset that currently educates them, hires them, and evaluates them—a mindset predominately crafted by men, for men, in times past.” Does my argument find resonance in your work, or is it more of what you would call another “civic stereotype?”

Leighninger: Yes, I agree that women can and do play an inordinate role in democracy-building. I remember first encountering this idea when, as an undergrad, I read Kathy Ferguson’s *Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*—and I felt I could see that idea in action when I started working with so many outstanding women organizers in communities. Of course men can be great democratic leaders too (many are), but it may be a greater shift in mindset for them to get used to some of these ideas.

Brown: What comes next in your work, Matt? What needs doing that you haven’t done yet?

Leighninger: I’m focused on three things now:

- helping to spread some of the stories and process knowledge I mentioned above, partly through a new online tool called the Democracy Helpline;
- helping the field make some progress on the “embeddedness” question—how we incorporate what we know about democracy and citizenship into the functioning of our institutions; and
- helping to develop the language and frame for this work so that we can talk about it in a more compelling and effective way.

Brown: If you would, please say more about Democracy Helpline.

Leighninger: The Helpline, a project of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, is an online resource that helps people find the democratic governance stories and resources most relevant to their situation. Community stories are the focus. The most valuable way to inspire and prepare new organizers is to give them narratives of existing projects that give them inspiration and useful lessons. On the beta version of the Helpline—www.deliberative-democracy.net—users encounter some diagnostic questions that help them think through the specifics of their

proposed projects. Using the answers to these questions, the site then offers a set of publications, organizations, and program examples that match their needs and interests. The beta version doesn't have nearly as many narratives or documents in the database as the full Helpline will have, but I think it is already a helpful resource. Here are some examples of how the full Helpline will work:

- A neighborhood organizer who wants to know how to mobilize residents around crime and trash pickup concerns will be presented with how-to ideas and stories of what happened when neighborhoods in Yonkers, New York and Delray Beach, Florida addressed these issues.
- A high school student interested in working with her peers on intergroup tension will find out about the way that youth leaders initiated school-based projects in Silver Spring, Maryland and launched a community-wide effort in Kuna, Idaho.
- A city planner who indicates a desire to work with residents in low-income neighborhoods will be presented with case studies like the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods process in Rochester, New York and the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative in San Jose, California.
- A parent who wants to help other parents work more constructively with the school their children attend will learn about examples from school districts in Kansas City, Kansas and Inglewood, California.
- A federal official who shows an interest in involving citizens in complex science-based policy questions would be given examples like the Danish Technology Boards, the engagement efforts of the Centers for Disease Control on pandemic influenza, and the work of the National Nanotechnology Initiative.

Brown: Thank you, Matt. We will follow your work with great interest.

MOVING TOWARD A CIVIC MISSION: The Relevance of Universities in Natural Resource and Environmental Policy

By Matthew McKinney

During the past five years, the Kettering Foundation and the Public Policy Research Institute at the University of Montana have explored a common interest in the political challenges posed by natural resource and environmental issues. We have considered a variety of ways in which citizens and civic associations are recognized as key actors in the political process. The purpose of this essay is to step back from individual projects and lessons learned about citizen participation and public problem solving, and reflect on what the Institute's experiences suggest in terms of the role of universities in promoting and supporting natural resource and environmental policy.

This essay is part autobiographical, part a reflection on the university-based policy center where I work, and part commentary on a small but (hopefully) significant trend in public universities.

A Personal Journey

After earning my doctorate in natural resource policy and conflict resolution, I interviewed for several academic jobs over a two-year period. Almost without fail, the formal part of the interviews emphasized the importance of teaching and research—and, if time permitted, it was okay to engage in public service. Later, during the informal part of the interviews—typically over a beer—the faculty explained in no uncertain terms the priorities and incentives for new faculty: publish or perish, don't be a bad teacher, and forget public service (at least until you earn tenure). I very much wanted to blend my academic work with some practical experience, so I deliberately chose not to pursue a traditional academic career.

Over the next 15 years, I worked as a planner and policy analyst for local, state, and federal agencies. I spent most of my time as a facilitator and mediator, working on projects related to land-use planning, water allocation, endangered species, superfund issues, national forest management, air quality, and so on. During this

Sustainability is about integrating people's diverse needs, interests, visions, and cultures.

time, I also held several adjunct teaching jobs at both public and private universities, and published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals, law reviews, and other publications.

After serving as the founding director of a small state-sponsored organization dedicated to building consensus among diverse stakeholders on natural resource and other public policy issues, I was approached by the president of the University of Montana. He asked if I was ready to build on my years of practical experience by helping to transform the university's public policy center and create an academic program on natural resources conflict resolution. Ready for a change, I jumped at the opportunity to work full time for the university.

An Applied Policy Center

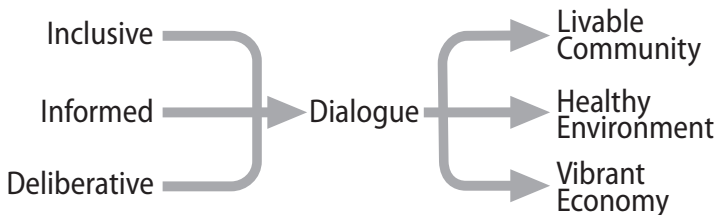
I now direct the Public Policy Research Institute at the University of Montana. The institute was created in 1987 by the university's board of regents to examine social and economic issues related to development. In 1990, the board of regents expanded the scope of the institute, recognizing the growing importance of the relationships among social, economic, and environmental issues. In political and academic circles, these links are best captured today by the terms "sustainable development" or "sustainability," often defined as development that meets human needs while conserving Earth's life-support system.

Achieving sustainability is not primarily a scientific or technical challenge, nor is it simply a question of managing natural resources more effectively and efficiently. At its core, sustainability is about integrating people's diverse needs, interests, visions, and cultures.

Throughout the world, there is a growing recognition that the most effective way to sustain communities and landscapes is to create opportunities for the right people to come together with the best available information to address issues of common concern.

Building on this trend and the purpose defined by the board of regents, the institute helps citizens and officials build livable communities, vibrant economies, and





healthy landscapes through inclusive, informed, and deliberative public processes.

By inclusive participation, we mean that an effort is made to meaningfully engage all viewpoints and interests, including those of unaffiliated citizens, advocates of local and

national interests, and decision makers. It also suggests that participants are empowered by the presumption that their input and advice will be considered by the decision makers and will influence the outcome.

An informed process is one where there is an equal opportunity to share views and information. The process fosters mutual learning, common understanding, and consideration of a variety of options. It enables participants to jointly develop and rely on the best available information, regardless of the source.

Deliberative dialogue occurs when people listen to each other, consider the rationale or reason for competing viewpoints (the interests that underlie the positions), and seek solutions that integrate as many interests as possible.

The institute believes that this principled approach to public dialogue does the following:

- results in decisions that receive broad public support;
- saves time and money when compared to lobbying, litigation, and other ways of shaping public policy or resolving public disputes;
- provides the most direct and meaningful form of public participation;
- effectively integrates social and political values with scientific and technical considerations; and
- makes implementation easier because the stakeholders have helped shape the proposed policy.

To achieve our goals, we focus on three programmatic areas. First, we have created what we believe is the only graduate-level certificate program in North America to focus on natural resources conflict resolution. Our goal is to build the collaborative capacity of the next generation of citizens, resource managers, and other civic leaders. During the first three years of the program, we have graduated 20 students representing a variety of disciplines, including

People outside the university are skeptical that a university-based policy center can be impartial, nonpartisan, and relevant on public policy issues.

environmental studies, communication, law, planning, forestry and conservation, political science, and public health.

Second, we also conduct applied research to inform and invigorate natural resource and environmental policy, and to advance the theory and practice of collaboration and conflict resolution. We publish a series of policy reports for citizens, advocates, and officials, as well as articles in refereed journals, law reviews, and popular magazines.

The third and final programmatic area is what we generally refer to as “projects.” This is our public service program, and we spend most of our time catalyzing, convening, facilitating, mediating, and otherwise helping citizens and officials solve tough natural resource and environmental issues. The Public Policy Research Institute serves as an impartial, nonpartisan forum to facilitate and mediate dialogue on the most compelling issues of the day. In sum, the institute is a collection of “reflective practitioners” or “pracademics,” as defined by Donald Schon in *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*.

This portfolio of activities runs somewhat counter to the dominant culture of the university. Despite the support of the university president, some faculty and administrators are lukewarm to our programs; a few have been overtly antagonistic. But that is only half of the equation. It is equally important to realize that people outside the university are skeptical that a university-based policy center can be impartial, nonpartisan, and relevant on public policy issues. In one ongoing project, some of the diverse stakeholders seem almost hostile to the institute’s catalyzing and convening a public forum to wrestle with a series of complex natural resource

issues. We’re trying to provide collaborative leadership in the face of a situation where everybody and nobody is in charge—a situation that cries out for someone to bring people, ideas, and information together. Whether driven by territoriality, fear of accountability, or something else, some of the people we are working with, both inside and outside the university, are suspicious of a university office playing the role of convenor.



The schism between academia and citizenship is widespread and ongoing.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated anecdote. The schism between academia and citizenship is widespread and ongoing. Nevertheless, a fresh crop of policy centers on campuses across the country (particularly in the West) holds some promise for improving the relevance of universities to civic life.

A Promising Trend

The participation of universities in natural resource and environmental policy stretches back at least to the founding of the land grant colleges in 1862. This role includes such notable examples as the cooperative wildlife research units catalyzed by the Wildlife Management Institute nearly a half century ago, as well as university-based public service programs supported by the Kellogg Foundation. These programs have evolved over time, and they contribute in some

ways to the substantive aspects of natural resource and environmental policy (and practice)—albeit not quite in the way some people might expect. In *Watershed Management: Balancing Sustainability and Environmental Change*, Ed Marston provides a critical review of the role of land grant universities in natural resource and environmental policy. More recently, several universities have started to focus on the political challenges posed by such issues.

The work of the Public Policy Research Institute is part of a small, but hopefully growing, trend in uni-

versities across the country. The Policy Consensus Initiative reports that more than 50 university-based policy centers provide consultation, convening, facilitating, training, research, and process design services for collaborative problem solving and governance, with more than 25 such centers in the American West alone.

Many of the West's policy centers focus on natural resources and environmental policy. Several are embedded within law schools and thus focus on legal issues related to natural resources and the environment. Others, as their names suggest, focus on issues related to sustainability. The majority of these policy centers and institutes describe themselves as interdisciplinary, partnership-focused and



solution-oriented. Other policy-oriented centers focus on multiparty collaboration and public dispute resolution. Many of these programs specialize in process design and facilitation, rather than focusing on any particular issue. Many provide facilitation services for state agencies and legislative bodies.

At the Public Policy Research Institute, we have intentionally tried to bridge the gap between two types of centers that are affiliated with universities: those that focus on natural resources and environmental law and policy, and those that focus on collaboration and conflict resolution. Our mission—to build livable communities,

vibrant economies, and healthy environments through inclusive, informed, and deliberative public dialogue—compels us to integrate the best of both models. We focus on natural resources and environmental policy by bringing together citizens and leaders with diverse viewpoints. We help them understand the issues, examine the options, and seek solutions that integrate as many interests as possible.



The efforts of policy centers that are focused on collaboration and conflict resolution are supported, in part, by at least four networks. The Center for Collaborative Policy at Sacramento State University maintains the Collaborative Democracy Network, a group of more than 100 people committed to improving the theory and practice of collaboration and deliberative dialogue. The Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University maintains a database of free online resources for people who teach collaborative governance. The Weil Program on Collaborative Governance at Harvard University is designed to facilitate a better understanding of the role and limitations of collaborative governance, and to identify and build the skills required to design and participate in effective collaboration. Finally, the Policy Consensus Initiative, in cooperation with other groups, has recently launched the University Network for Collaborative Governance. The purpose of the network is to promote and support the role of universities as forums to solve public issues.

While this trend is promising, it is important to keep it in context. As much as we like to think of universities as pioneers of

Universities are some of the more byzantine institutions on the planet.

new ideas and bastions of entrepreneurs, they are some of the more byzantine institutions on the planet. A colleague and good friend was recently considered for promotion to full professor at one of the country's top public universities. Unfortunately, this individual was advised to postpone his application. His colleagues concluded that he spent too much time on public service projects and not enough time on research and teaching; and he coauthored (i.e., collaborated on) too many publications, not producing enough publications on his own.



This anecdotal experience resonates with my own impressions. Traditional academics have little patience for applied policy work, especially work of a collaborative nature. A common complaint is that applied work (and the policy centers that conduct such work) siphons limited resources away from the core mission of the university, which is teaching and research.

Understanding and Overcoming Resistance

As a matter of course, universities are not predisposed to support applied work on natural resources and environmental policy for a number of reasons. First, natural resource policy problems, with few exceptions, require interdisciplinary responses. However, the policy-relevant disciplines are organized (and separated) by departments and dominated by specialized silos that make collaborative research exceedingly difficult. The resulting scholarship typically fails to provide adequate diagnoses or prescriptions for problems as they exist in the real world.

Second, the primary audience for academics is other academics, not policymakers or citizens. Success is defined as a positive response to one's research agenda, rather than efficacy in real-world problem solving. The goal is not to generate ideas that work, but rather to publish something that satisfies one's peers. Good results or successes are measured not by social change, but by positive reviews in professional journals.

Third, citizens and officials have limited confidence in the role and relevance of universities in helping to solve natural resource and environmental problems. The ivory tower syndrome is a well-worn cliché among people outside academia. Moreover, elected and appointed officials tend to be preoccupied with politics over policy. Partisanship and the effort to get reelected take precedence over the need to solve on-the-ground problems. These impulses suggest that the reaction of citizens and officials to a refined (more civic) mission of universities will be slow and halting.

For all these reasons, universities are ill equipped to assist citizens and officials in solving natural resource and environmental problems. The table below—A Tale of Two Cultures, adapted from

A Tale of Two Cultures

ATTRIBUTE	ACADEMIC COMMUNITY	POLICY COMMUNITY
Objective	Respect of Academic Peers	Approval of Voters
Time Horizons	Long	Short
Focus	Internal Logic of Problem	External Logic of Setting
Mode of Thought	Inductive, Generic	Deductive, Particular
Mode of Work	Solo	Collaborative
Most Valued Outcome	Original Insight	Effective Solution
Mode of Expression	Abstruse, Qualified	Simple, Absolute
Preferred Form of Conclusion	Multiple Possibilities Depends on Objectives Uncertainties Emphasized	One “best solution” Objectives Unspecified Uncertainties Submerged
Concern for Feasibility	Small	Great
Stability of Interest	Low	High

the work of Peter Szanton—summarizes the different attributes of the academic and policy communities, and suggests the need to build one or more two-way bridges to cross the divide.

The Public Policy Research Institute attempts to bridge this cultural divide by respecting the differences; creating opportunities



for representatives from the two communities to interact, exchanging ideas and building relationships; and demonstrating the merits of blending the two cultures to educate future citizens and officials and to solve tough public policy issues.

Prescriptions and Conclusions

Several prescriptions emerge from this narrative. First and foremost, universities must address the internal, structural problem of the reward system. According to *Restructuring the University Reward System: A Report by the Sid W. Richardson Foundation Forum*, the reward system for faculty needs to place more emphasis on teaching and public service. While it may be difficult to reform the traditional conventions of the tenure process (at least initially), perhaps tenured faculty could be evaluated, in part, on the basis of how their work practically addresses society's problems. Derek Barker has tracked some promising experiments along this line in what he refers to as the "scholarship of engagement." This reform could significantly inform and invigorate debates on natural resource and environmental policy by providing thoughtful, timely advice to citizens and leaders.

To complement the suggested role of faculty in shaping and evaluating policy options, universities (as well as citizens and officials) should build on the emerging work of policy centers (like the Public Policy Research Institute) to serve as impartial, nonpartisan forums. These policy centers can improve the role of citizens and civic associations in the political dialogue around natural resource and environmental issues.

This difficult conversation will no doubt ruffle some feathers.

Another ambitious option is to create, encourage, and support schools of environmental and public policy that have a distinctly applied focus and a commitment to help citizens and officials solve tough public policy issues.

To overcome the lack of confidence on the part of citizens and officials, universities will need to make a commitment to policy-relevant research; serve as impartial, nonpartisan convenors of public dialogue and problem solving; and demonstrate their effectiveness. It will take some time to create such a track record. A more immediate option is for universities to coconvene dialogues with officials from local, state, and federal agencies, as well as key stakeholder groups in the natural resource and environmental community, to explore how the university could play a more effective role in natural resource and environmental policy. As documented by Charles Foster, states and universities in New England engaged in such a dialogue in the 1990s.

This is a difficult conversation, and it will no doubt ruffle some feathers. The enormity of the challenge, however, does not excuse us from responding. There is hope. The emerging policy centers around the West, as well as throughout the country, serve as laboratories, conducting experiments on how to meet these challenges. Moreover, the attitude of university presidents suggests that change is in the wind. More than ten years ago, some 300 college and university presidents signed a “Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education.” The declaration concludes:

We believe that the challenge of the next millennium is the renewal of our own democratic life and reassertion of social stewardship. In celebrating the birth of our democracy, we can think of no nobler task than committing ourselves to helping catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of higher education. We believe that now and through the next century, our institutions must be vital agents and architects of a flourishing democracy. We urge all of higher education to join us.

This is precisely the type of leadership needed to meet the challenge of creating universities that embrace and practice a civic mission in the 21st century.

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THE ART OF TRUSTEESHIP

An Interview with Deborah Wadsworth

David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with Deborah Wadsworth about her work as chairperson of the board of trustees of Bennington College, a small private liberal arts college in Vermont.

Brown: It's very interesting that Bennington is "taking the lead in teaching values that will allow students to become active in issues such as democracy." Tell me more about how that works at Bennington.

Wadsworth: The animating idea is to create a new liberal arts that takes as its central purpose nurturing the ethical habits and intellectual capacities of an active citizenry—ideas that would not be unfamiliar to those who founded this democracy. If a primary objective is educating students to affect the quality of public life, it means rethinking what is most fundamental: transforming priorities, redirecting energies to the grave and obvious problems we face in the world today; in effect, reorienting liberal education so the public good, rather than self interest, becomes a primary objective.

Brown: Well said. Please go on.

Wadsworth: As Bennington's president, Elizabeth Coleman, has said, "We intend to turn the full force of the intellectual and imaginative power, passion, and boldness of our students, faculty, and staff on developing strategies for acting on pressing public needs of self-evident urgency, complexity, and importance ... Our goal is not to study poverty, the failures of education, the abuses of force, but to do something about them."

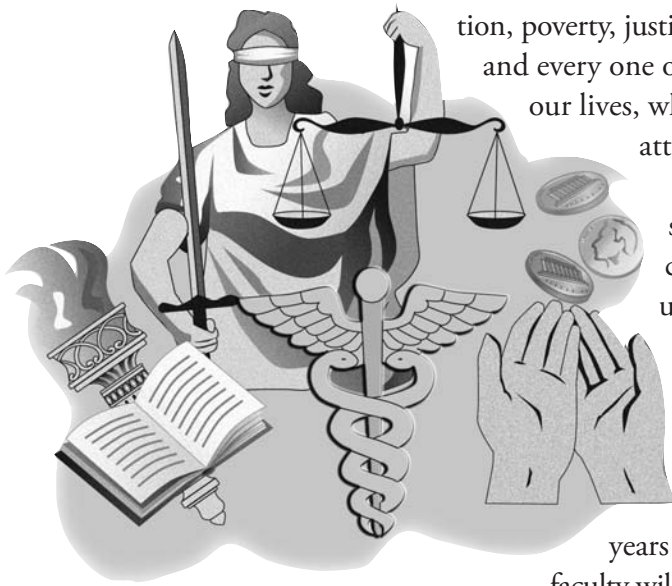
We began last fall by offering several "design labs" as prototypes. They are a key curricular component of the new initiative. They are called laboratories to underscore the quintessentially open-ended, collaborative nature of this work. They go beyond the bounds of a typical course and their approach is emphatically interdisciplinary. They are intended to be hands-on, change-the-world workshops—learning communities grounded in complex thought and concrete action.

A small group of students, led by at least two faculty members, comes together to grapple with one particular, urgent,

real-world problem. Visiting practitioners with direct experience in these arenas join the courses at various times, as do other Bennington faculty members who may be called upon during the course of study.

Brown: Are the real-world problems within the local, geographic reach of the students and faculty?

Wadsworth: Real-world problems—health, education, poverty, justice, and equality—are what each and every one of us ought to be addressing in our lives, wherever we are, as active citizens attempting to live in the world as we wish it would be. As I've said, we are determined to refocus our education on the most urgent problems of our times and to inculcate the ethical habits and intellectual capacities essential to maintaining our democracy. As our students progress through their years at Bennington, they and the



faculty will grapple with potential solutions, initially in their classes, and then in eight-week-long required internships taken annually by every student off campus. Instilling habits of mind and linking thought and action is what we are about, and in so doing, we are also striving to achieve our founders' promise to provide an education as rich in "constructive social purpose" as in "individual fulfillment."

Let me describe some of our initial design labs which were piloted in Fall 2007. They were every bit as provocative and engaging as we had hoped and, I think, may address your question:

1. Green Projects: Community and Campus, led by an ecologist and a chemist with assistance from an economist, an architect, and facilities and finance personnel from the college, addressed issues of energy and the environment with a focus that was pointedly local.
2. Collaboration and Conflict, team-taught by faculty from international relations, the social sciences, and the arts, examined three instances of international conflict and provided training in mediation in order to engage the possibilities and limits of managing conflict.

3. In “Why Math/What Math” a physicist/mathematician, his students, and guest participants tackled the most fundamental questions about the nature and value of mathematics as a prelude to taking on the challenge of how to make access to its power widely available.
4. Rethinking Education, led jointly by the college’s president and the director of admissions, with support from a variety of faculty, explored the assumptions that inform much of the thinking about education and its potential for change as preparation for developing strategies for closing the gap between what should be and what is.

The development of additional design labs occurred throughout the year, and five new labs were offered in the 2008-2009 academic year. In brief, they focused on: a study of the AIDS pandemic and the cultures, politics, and science underlying this global crisis; the intersection of design, consumerism, and the globalization of trade; a survey of theories of change and consultation intended to help students develop a skill set in facilitating lasting change; a study of various marine habitats in order to articulate a particular problem that is associated with human interaction with the sea; and a collaborative effort between a dancer and a costume designer, both also trained as mediators, which focused on developing strategies and alternatives through education and mentoring for children who have been victims of domestic violence, poverty, and drug abuse.

All collaborative and action-oriented, the labs were led by an anthropologist and a cell biologist; an architect and an artist; an academic administrator with guest lecturers; and an artist and a biologist. The possibilities for additional labs are multiplying, and participation by faculty and students has become infectious.

Brown: I was impressed with Coleman’s insight that this kind of education prepares students for a world where “no one has the answer ... so you have to work together.” Is this an implicit criticism of professional credentialing in higher education that so often assumes that experts “solve” problems rather than doing it collectively with others?

Wadsworth: You have zeroed in on two basic problems this curriculum hopes to address, and you have written eloquently about them in *HEX 2008*. Central to our ideal is the belief that it is essential to develop a sense of agency among all who would take on the serious and hard work of democracy. By that I mean, everyone

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must bring something to the table. Faculty can no longer lay claim to the role of being the sole “expert” in the room. Everyone’s experience matters, and the practice of give and take establishes the collaborative nature of true problem solving. Needless to say, this requires a wholly different mindset among faculty and students.

As you pointed out, a deeply ingrained professional mindset in higher education has fostered a culture of “credentialed” problem solvers, a situation, as you and I know, that is also deeply embedded in our society. Citizens have been conditioned over time to accept being relegated to the sidelines routinely when solutions to problems, be they local, national, or global, are required. And so, in our new initiative, students and faculty alike must struggle together

to reimagine what it is to learn, to read, to understand, to figure things out as they evolve, and to link their deliberations to action. When the object is deciding on the most effective course of action, the act of leadership is to invite and expand the input of others rather than to contain it.



Brown: President Coleman has described Bennington’s initiative as “a reorientation of liberal education so the public good becomes a primary objective.” Does that mean that the college has a quarrel with the kind of liberal education now pursued by other liberal arts colleges? And, if so, how did liberal education lose its way?

Wadsworth: Liberal arts colleges and universities, with few exceptions, have done little to nurture the ethical habits and intellectual values of an active citizenry. They appear to have fallen prey to society’s focus on individual achievement and personal gain at the expense of the common good, and course offerings at many institutions increasingly reflect such a bias. Preprofessional majors and certification programs are routinely marketed to prospective students and their parents, reinforcing the notion of education—their “product”—as a commodity in response to customers whose needs they would satisfy.

Given the increasing cost of higher education, and the search among applicants and their families for the best possible “pay off,” the idea of providing access to a credential that absolutely improves

job prospects is ubiquitous. Catalogs of course offerings do little to dispel this mindset as they frequently are organized around pre-professional training from freshman year on. As for faculty, an ingrained reverence for specialization and expertise which celebrates technical virtuosity and scholarly competence leaves the academy averse to tackling problems that do not fit neatly into traditional academic categories.

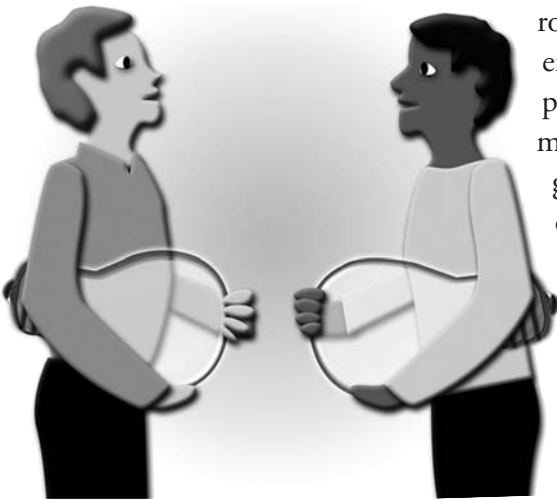
The proliferation of community service programs on campuses nationwide is a nod in the direction of reconnecting these institutions to the communities in which they reside, while fostering “civic engagement” among their students. Important as such activities may be, they remain fundamentally an approach to existing symptoms where the choice of what to do is self-evident. Students who do participate find their experiences are seldom integrated into anything they are studying on campus, and are treated significantly as “extracurricular” activities. Rarely do these experiences raise the need to address underlying policies—the root causes that result in poverty, illiteracy, and injustice. Once again, the academy reinforces a separation of civic virtue and intellectual accomplishment—“what you do here with us” from “what you may attempt to do out in the world.”

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Brown: Coleman has said that such colleges should be held “more accountable for their failure to educate students to be better citizens.” Is it the role of trustees to do that?

Wadsworth: Yes, I absolutely believe American colleges have an obligation to graduate young men and women prepared to take on the real responsibilities of citizenship in our democracy. And

trustees must help. In my experience, the role of trustees in the delicate web of governance is to nurture, sustain, and hold presidents accountable for achieving a mutually agreed upon set of values and goals. Trustees have an obligation to be deeply knowledgeable about all facets of the institutions they steward, and they function most effectively when they provide a sounding board for senior management, raising intelligent questions regarding strategic directions and long-term policies, or the absence of them. A failure to educate students for



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their role as active citizens should surely be on every college's agenda; yet sadly, this does not appear to be the case. I worry that too few trustees are courageous enough to raise issues that may result in contentious deliberations.

The new liberal arts program at Bennington has been a joint endeavor of the president, her senior colleagues, faculty, and trustees. The initiative is evolving slowly and with care, and my hope is that we will be a bellwether for other liberal arts colleges and their governing boards of trustees. But I must say, I believe this may be an uphill battle. For many years, I was the president of Public Agenda, an organization noted for its nonpartisan public opinion research. Recent surveys by Public Agenda of parents and the general public regarding the purposes of higher education in America appear to reinforce the notion of college first and foremost as a prerequisite to a good job and a good life. The introduction of collegiate responsibility for preparing active citizens for our democracy is hardly on the radar screen. No one would deny the importance of the public's goals, but they should not preclude the reorientation of liberal education to enable a ceaseless dialogue between the pulls of public responsibilities and those of private ambitions and aspirations. Bennington is committed to challenging each student to discover in his or her own fashion what it means and what it takes to live a *good*, as well as a successful, life.

Brown: What we have discussed thus far is obviously not the first substantial change Bennington has experienced in recent years. Retaining academic disciplines but eliminating academic departments in the mid 1990s was a kind of watershed for the college to get more faculty to work together across academic disciplines. A 1995 trustee piece said that otherwise individual faculty were at a "disadvantage" by being neutralized as "agents of change." Has that approach developed as planned?

Wadsworth: Much of the world watched as Bennington went through a major transformation under the leadership of President Coleman over the past twenty years. Impoverished and with declining enrollments, back then the college was roiled by disaffected faculty and students. Working closely with the board of trustees, representatives of the faculty, students, and alums, President Coleman set about to transform Bennington in ways that were entirely consonant with its rich traditions and historical past. The focus on growing a faculty of serious practitioners who were producing work in their fields, and eliminating academic departments—removing the typical

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enclaves of power within the college—though revolutionary at the time, resonated with Bennington’s founding principles. As we all know, and many of us have experienced, traditional academic structures and mores remain deeply entrenched, and faculty are not noted for their enthusiasm as agents of change. Our progress has been slower than we had hoped, but we have progressed at a steady pace, instantiating collaboration across disciplines as an ideal. Year by year, collaborative opportunities for study, much like a steady basso continuo, through dynamic course offerings reverberate across the curriculum.

This latest evolution in our curriculum is but a natural evolution—the right next step for us to take as a historically cutting-edge liberal arts college. But this idea cannot prevail without the embrace of the faculty that is designing and implementing it, and there will be fits and starts as it grows to embrace more and more of our community. As President Coleman has said, “we have had the courage to begin.... ultimately our success will depend on the power of these ideas ... on that score.” She said “I have never been more confident.” The Board of Trustees is with her 100 percent.

Brown: When did you join the Bennington board and how did you see your role as a trustee? Has your viewpoint changed since then and, if so, why?

Wadsworth: I had the great good fortune to join Bennington in 1998 at a moment when all systems were heading upward and onward. Enrollments have grown year by year, financial stability has returned, and despite the current economic uncertainties, we remain engaged in a robust and beautiful physical renewal of this very lovely campus in the foothills of the Green Mountains in southern Vermont.

I am not a graduate of Bennington College, but as someone whose professional life has kept me in close contact with higher education, I have long been interested in and admiring of this very special liberal arts college, which demands so much of each and every student. When invited to join the board, I responded with enthusiasm because I believed that those who would become my colleagues as trustees were devoted to this institution and that under the leadership of



Liz Coleman, Bennington was once again on its way toward reclaiming its role as one of the most intellectually challenging institutions around. Historically, the college had been in the forefront in understanding how essential it was to integrate the arts into any serious study of liberal arts. The education its students received had depended largely on their capacity to shape and steer it over their four years, and the close faculty advising that made all this possible connoted a commitment that was rare on college campuses. President Coleman was building on these traditions while boldly charting a new future for this college in an increasingly complex world.

I saw my role, as I mentioned earlier, to be one of serious and thoughtful stewardship. President Coleman has been exceedingly transparent with her trustees, and we have been emboldened to challenge goals, strategies, and practical policies. I believe that higher education overall, and liberal arts colleges in particular, have a distinctive commitment to prepare the next generation of leaders for our nation. I am apoplectic over the silence and seeming complacency of our educational institutions to the mounting crises confronting the public good. Where are the cries of concern from the academy? Where are our intellectual leaders, willing to take on the urgent issues of our times and challenge the prevailing ethos? We at Bennington agree with President Coleman that “the vital connection between education and a vibrant citizenship, once the bedrock of public education, has atrophied, making the perpetuation of our democracy increasingly precarious.”

Brown: What has been the most significant “challenge” to you as a trustee?

Wadsworth: I serve on several boards of nonprofit organizations. They each offer significant and distinctive challenges, based on their professed goals and values, but they all share a common commitment to the centrality of an educated citizenry as the lifeblood of our democracy. Thus, the challenge has seldom been one of determining the mission or long-term goals of these institutions. Rather, our focus frequently is on the strategic choices to be made to achieve our goals, and how to make these choices in the most collegial way. For one impatient to get to the goal, learning the art of trusteeship is a challenging process. Navigating among various constituencies—the administration, faculty, and trustees themselves—requires the skills of a mediator, patience, and above all, respect. I recall at the start of my tenure as a trustee at Bennington, there was a need to transform an inadequately functioning faculty

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review process. All involved believed it was necessary, but it was hard to imagine that such an effort could be a shared enterprise among faculty, administration, and trustees. Leaders in each of these constituencies were determined to produce a mutually acceptable plan. My predecessor as chairman, we as trustees, President Coleman, the provost, and faculty representatives worked together to design a process that has proved to be far more effective to this day than we even imagined. It was a unique collaboration, I suspect—probably almost unheard of within higher education. Patience and respect prevailed, and I have thought of this often as new challenges arise.

Brown: How do you see your role as chairperson of Bennington's board? When you have occasions to meet with trustees from other colleges, do they see their trustee role much the same as you do?

Wadsworth: I think we've talked about this a bit already. You know, over the twenty years in which I led Public Agenda, I worked closely with our founders and with two successive executive committee chairs who were very successful corporate leaders. They were ceaselessly supportive of all we were attempting, while bringing a fierce scrutiny to the management of the organization. They did not hesitate to ask tough questions, and they were always there for me when I sought advice. I suspect they also occasionally mediated among their fellow trustees when there were concerns, ultimately filtering them through to me. They were good role models.

I see my role as an interpretive one, occasionally functioning as a "go-between," giving voice to differing perspectives, when necessary, and working continuously toward achieving consensus. I participate in a Conference of Board Chairs comprised of leaders of small liberal arts colleges throughout the country. We meet several times a year, and our agenda covers a wide range of topics. It is encouraging to realize that we all struggle with similar issues, often resolving them in similar ways.

Brown: Given what we have talked about thus far, can Bennington's example be a precedent for other liberal arts colleges or does its professed uniqueness make such replication unlikely?

Wadsworth: Bennington has had a significant niche in higher education and has had an impact far beyond what its size might suggest. But we are not unique. I often think one must be wary of institutions that create and believe their own myths. We are

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wholesomely irreverent when it comes to facing the realities of the current scene in higher education in the U.S. We are a small institution which, like others, is planting a stake in the ground for its future, and we understand we are not likely to be the sole standard bearer for what we believe is essential for American democracy at this moment. However, we are small enough to be nimble and flexible enough to correct our mistakes as we proceed, and for sure, we are an exquisite laboratory for testing what we believe the future of liberal education needs to look like. Other institutions will try their version of educating for the 21st century. Some will like what they see at Bennington and adapt it to the special circumstances of their institutions. Make no mistake about our modesty, though: “Bennington is yet again going for the gold.”

Brown: Thank you, Deborah.

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF THE FOOTBRIDGE FORUM

By Denise Dowling

The dawn of the Internet has changed the role of journalists. In past decades there was no conversation between journalists and the public—journalists simply told audiences “what they needed to know.” Opportunities for the public to engage with newspapers, television, and radio were limited, and feedback from citizens was often met with hostility and suspicion on the part of the media.

Today, journalists are beginning to recognize their role as facilitators of dialogue. Around the world, members of the Fourth Estate are exploring their role in the conversations that are taking place all around them. News media are convening public forums in person and in cyberspace, bringing together experts and citizens in ways never before possible. The old one-way approach to delivering content is changing to a new model with unexplored and, perhaps, unlimited possibilities.

This changing role for journalists is being explored by students at the University of Montana through their work on a program called the Footbridge Forum. The idea was to create a forum for deliberative dialogue and take it to the radio airwaves. In an age when talk radio is often filled with shouting, finger-pointing, and vitriol, the Footbridge Forum presents an opportunity for the public and the experts to experience a different kind of dialogue. The soapbox has been replaced by a table surrounded by a small group of well-intentioned citizens giving thoughtful consideration to an issue that deeply affects their lives.

The Footbridge Forum

Beginning in 2003, the Footbridge Forum provided students in the radio-television department at UM’s School of Journalism the opportunity to produce, report, direct, and host a program designed to explore new ways of bringing diverse voices to the radio station, which is a large part of the station’s mission. The department partnered with the independent college radio station, KBGA, to bring the forum to the air. KBGA, known for alternative



music and programming, serves the college campus and the greater Missoula, Montana, area. While the program was loosely patterned after the National Issues Forum, the station and student producers knew they had a challenge in creating a venue for meaningful dialogue while still creating an interesting radio show.

Students participating in the program and accompanying course were given a charge: choose a “town and gown” topic of interest—one that would engage both the campus and the Missoula community; consider whether the perceived problem had the depth and variety of opinions to sustain lively deliberation; find people who represent a cross section of points of view on the subject, and seat them around a table for a live radio discussion. It was a tall order, but the students came through in powerful ways.

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The topics chosen by these students were complex and provocative, and some issues they selected seemed impossible to solve. But the students had the uncanny good luck of finding engaging and opinionated citizens, both in their panelists and through live feedback from listeners, who helped identify and define the problems, learn about current efforts, and brainstorm possible solutions. The results of the discussions and the proposed solutions were handed to those in policy-making positions, and the students were empowered when they saw that, in some cases, the suggestions led to changes.

In its current form, the Footbridge Forum devotes five hours of on-air programming to each issue. Citizen panelists come together in the first, third, and fifth shows to essentially frame the issue, explore the underlying causes of the problem, and work toward solutions. Shows Two and Four feature experts on the subject, who are called on to answer questions posed during the previous citizen panels. Students act as reporters, gathering information and opinions from those directly affected by the issue in order to spur the discussion. They also host the shows, gently steering the group toward creating a list of concrete solutions to address the problem.

Throughout the show, listeners are invited to participate by calling or emailing during the live broadcast.

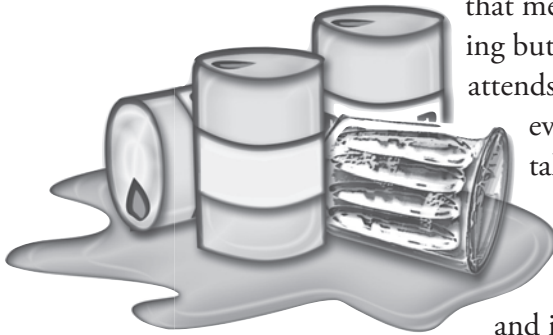
The citizen panelists were asked to commit to three live, on-air hours of discussion, each approximately one month apart. They came together before each show for an informal reception, where producers laid out the loose plan for the evening and encouraged each panelist to jump right into the conversation. Over time, the guests became more comfortable with each other and with the host; as their relationship grew, it often seemed the guests were having a discussion around a kitchen table, and the host was minimally involved.

The citizen forums helped shape the expert forums and even influenced the selection of the experts. Student producers sought out those who could answer the questions and address the concerns that arose during the citizen panels. The information that came from the expert forum then rolled into the next citizen forum, which, in turn, led to the next expert forum, and so on.

Tackling Tough Topics

The following three examples highlight the impact this program has had. One successful series was “Cocktail Culture,” in which citizens pondered the issue of alcohol use and abuse on campus and in the community.

For this citizen panel, students identified a man who abstains from alcohol because of the abuse he witnessed at home while growing up; a sorority sister angry about the common perception that members of the Greek system do nothing but party; and an older citizen who attends the football tailgate parties during every home game. Together, they talked about the culture of alcohol surrounding sporting events and other events in the community. The discussion was wide ranging and included these facts:



- Montana has one of the nation’s highest rates of alcohol-related car accidents.
- Until recently, it was legal for a driver to drink alcohol in a vehicle driven on county roads in the state.
- According to campus administrators, alcohol abuse is a primary factor in students’ struggles in the classroom and in social situations.



Alcohol use was a prime example of a deep problem with many layers. This is a problem students perceived as being so ingrained as to be nearly impossible to root out. At the end of this series of radio programs, the citizen panelists came up with some concrete suggestions for change aimed at parents, citizens, educators, and the media. Some of those proposals are the following:

- For parents, educate young people about loss of employment options and effect on chances for military service if they're arrested for an alcohol-related offense.
- For educators, be more forthcoming or honest in both high school and college orientation sessions about the realities of alcohol use and abuse.
- For the media, stop glamorizing drinking.

The director of the student health center was keenly interested in what she heard on the air. The Footbridge Forum exposed what was working and, perhaps more important, what wasn't working with regard to the issue of alcohol abuse on campus. As a result, the health center expanded the alcohol-awareness segment of the new student orientation. They concentrated more heavily on the degree of alcohol exposure all students face. Also, they beefed up the information for students and parents about programs in place to help students cope with their own alcohol issues or those of friends or roommates.

A second successful series of programs was called "Faking the Grade," which dealt with cheating in college. During this forum, student panelists asserted it was OK to pay someone else to write a paper if the student was so busy and stressed he or she didn't have time to get it done. They saw no problem with getting test answers from a previous class in order to do better on an exam. They talked about the demands of work, school, and social life, and why cheating was an acceptable way to occasionally balance those demands.

When pushed by the program host, students acknowledged that cheating ultimately hurt the cheaters by depriving them of legitimate learning and setting them up for failure in their profession.

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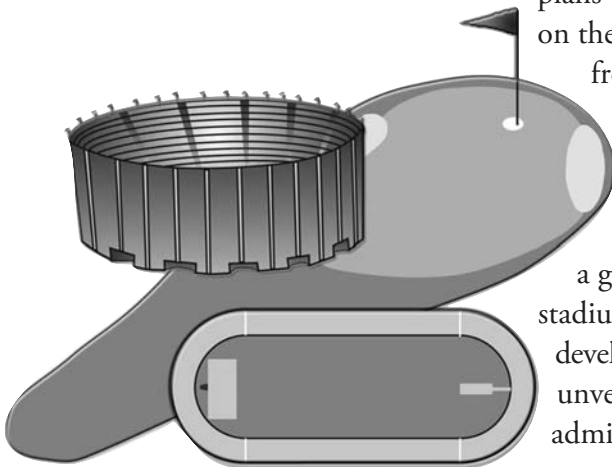
Nonstudents insisted cheating was a short-term solution that only caused bigger problems in the long run. The group came up with a significant list of ways to stop cheating on campus. The list was forwarded to the university president, who sent it along to every dean and department chair:

- For professors, make examples of those caught cheating, even if privacy issues do not allow revealing details. Make it harder to cheat by rewriting tests, monitoring students during testing, and giving different versions of tests to the same class.
- For high school teachers, teach, and repeatedly reinforce, the rules of citation and attribution. Show students how to rewrite information to avoid accusations of plagiarism.
- For administrators, spread the message that cheating will not be tolerated. Make no exceptions, and make penalties severe and public. Support professors who crack down on cheaters.

The third forum example, a series called “Developing South Campus,” took on the heated issue of land use on the campus. Students producing the Footbridge Forum had heard about the university’s plans for a prime parcel of land and wanted to learn more about the community’s reactions. They decided to tackle the topic just as the public was learning about these plans.

The university administration had quietly proposed developing a piece of property that was owned by the university but was not part of the main campus. A developer was paid to work up plans to construct private housing on the parcel, which was a half-mile from the campus proper.

Citizens were not consulted about what they thought was the best use for the parcel, which encompassed a golf course, track and field stadium, and sports fields. The developer’s designs were first unveiled in Denver, and when administrators then brought the



plans to a Missoula audience, the format was simply a presentation, with no public input allowed. Citizens were up in arms. The letters to the editor in the local newspaper were filled with anger about the university's handling of the planning.

Meanwhile, civil conversation was taking place on the KBGA airwaves, with citizens weighing in with suggestions for that particular piece of real estate. The citizens from the Footbridge

Forum suggested these alternatives:

- Use the land for academic buildings or other facilities for students.
- Consider building a major research facility that would involve students and the community.
- Find a way to make the golf course more profitable, preserving the golf course for as long as possible during the development stages.
- Open up the discussion to get all ideas on the table and honestly consider other options.



Once these suggestions were forwarded to the university administration and the board of regents, the plan to build private housing on the parcel was denied by the board and administrators were sent back to the drawing board. The university started from scratch, involving the public from the very beginning in the process to plan for that piece of land. This work is still ongoing.

Lessons Learned

Over the years the Footbridge Forum has found a rhythm and a formula that works. But there were missteps along the way. In hindsight, we realize the first few programs were ineffective. They were held in a theater with a dozen panelists sitting around a group of tables. The idea was to invite the public to the theater to offer input. The panel comprised students, professors and staff from the campus, residents of Missoula and the surrounding area, and individuals who were considered experts on the issue being addressed. The problems with this setup were numerous.



The open nature of the theater setting seemed like a good way to invite the public to participate in the forum.

However, the cavernous room, with hundreds of empty seats, created an odd sense that the panelists were talking to no one. The room echoed, despite the use of quality microphones. People coming and going distracted the

panelists. Because a dozen or so panelists were seated, the table configuration left people relatively distant from each other.

From the outset, the goal of the program was to invite people to participate in the discussion. During the first few shows held in the theater, people interested in the subject were invited to stop by, step up to the microphone, and offer their input. At the time it was the only possible way to engage a wide variety of people in the process. A few people did take the time and make the effort to engage in this way, but it was almost always a participant with a “bone to pick” who managed to derail the conversation by jumping on their soapbox.

Listeners were invited to call in with comments, but the technical gyrations necessary to make that happen proved too complicated. Phone calls had to be transferred to the theater from the radio station two floors below. Participants in the panel could hear the phone calls only through a speaker in the ceiling. Feedback problems interfered with the callers’ audio and often panelists couldn’t hear parts of their comments. It often took so long to get a caller to the air that the panel had moved on to another topic and the caller’s comment was no longer relevant.

Perhaps the greatest problem came with the choice of panelists in those early shows. Students worked diligently to find “regular” people who had an interest in the topic being discussed. They used their contacts in the community to identify people who were living with the issue. They had good success. The problem came with inviting experts on the subject to sit around the same table. Experts, armed with studies and statistics, dominated the conversations in those early shows. Citizens found their opinions and experiences invalidated when contradicted by numbers and graphs.

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One example is an early show that tackled the problem of wages in Missoula. College graduates often take jobs in the retail or service sector at minimum wage simply to stay in a town they've grown to love. The show, called *Wage Rage*, had the potential to shed some light on a deep and lingering problem for young people in Missoula and the rest of Montana. But when the head of the Missoula Area Economic Development Corporation shared the statistics regarding jobs, those suffering from "wage rage" fell silent. Their concerns and experiences were marginalized in the light of the hard information that things "weren't that bad."

The show relies on a sense of trust among the panelists and the student hosts. The students ask these citizens to share intimate stories about their experiences. To foster that relationship, a preshow reception brings the group together over refreshments to listen to some of the reporting that students have done on the issue and get the conversation started before the on-air show begins. Whatever success this reception created in allowing the relationships to grow was undermined when panelists were put in a large room with so-called experts by their side.

Additionally, when the Footbridge Forum first began, the live program tackled one issue for one hour of on-air programming. That was another mistake. It's difficult to really dig into any issue of importance in only one hour. Even working diligently, participants could only scratch the surface of the problem. The panelists either immediately jumped to proposing solutions or never got there at all.

After the first year of the radio shows, it was apparent that changes needed to be made to the program. Student producers sat down to define what they hoped to accomplish in these programs and worked with the student management at KBGA to come up with a different format for the programs.

At about the same time, students were invited to attend an international deliberative dialogue workshop at the Kettering Foundation to share what they'd learned and to learn from others. David Mathews, president of the foundation, shared his views on the nature of deliberative dialogue. His sense of the true nature of deliberation helped to shape the Footbridge Forum at this critical juncture and as it grew through the years. Mathews shared his thoughts on how to determine whether, in fact, deliberative dialogue is taking place. These were his key questions:

- Is there serious work going on?
- Are people struggling to make a decision of great

consequence? Is that struggle apparent as people weigh different options?

- Do listeners have a sense that this forum is more than just a gripe session or informative discussion?
- Have participants been “charged” with accomplishing a task?
- Are there more than one or two options on the table?
- Were there honest differences of opinion over what’s important?
- Is the “public thinking” which is going on made apparent to the listeners? Is that public thinking reflected in the conclusion?
- Did the deliberation affect participants’ perception of their own role in the struggle? Is their behavior at all affected after the fact?
- Are the results “handed up” to office holders or others in a position to change policy?

Student producers took these ideas to heart, came back to Montana, and reworked the format of the program to attempt to engage citizens in the hard work of deliberation. The changes improved the quality of the programs significantly by creating a format that allowed and encouraged more meaningful dialogue.

The venue was the first thing to change. Student producers abandoned the idea of holding the sessions in a theater and inviting people “off the street” to participate in the forum. A small conference room adjacent to the radio station proved a better setting for creating the desired intimacy among panelists. The room held one long conference table with room for a student host, six guests, and an audio mixer and operator. A typical program now includes five or six citizen panelists sitting in close proximity to each other. The reduced number also allows each panelist to get to know the others, and they often call each other by name during the live shows.

The venue change made it much easier to get phone calls and emails on the air. The participation increased when it was demonstrated how easily a listener could comment on an issue.

Students also expanded the number of shows dedicated to a particular topic. Now each subject is featured in five separate programs of one hour each. Additionally, the experts were removed from the citizen panels and placed in programs of their own.

Student Learning

Students' visions of what it means to be a journalist had been informed by the "old" way of doing things. These comments from students show how participation in the forum led them to a wider view of their profession:

By the simple format of the show, the Footbridge Forum allowed me to learn more about the views of the everyday "Joe" or "Jane." And that is what journalism is about—raising awareness of the issues that affect people the most.

Footbridge affected how I feel by allowing me to see what a difference can be made by people who are actually concerned about community issues becoming involved in journalism.

Before participating in Footbridge, I had no idea what citizen journalism was. The idea of letting average people help in news gathering was completely "out there." After taking part in Footbridge, I look at news gathering in a completely different way. I think citizens are so important to accurately telling stories now. Most people don't have the opportunity to voice their opinions, and citizen journalism is a way for those people to show how issues affect them.

I have a positive view of what the Footbridge Forum does, because I feel it covers the topics in a constructive way. Real people are able to express their opinions and talk about things that matter and affect them. The listener then gets the opportunity to hear many sides of the story and hear it in such a way that professional journalists may not be able to express within the bounds of objectivity.

Previously, I only knew citizen journalism to mean the ability of regular, unaccredited people to report news as they saw fit, on a blog or podcast. Now I see how a panel of citizens can say things that unbiased journalists cannot.

Educators in broadcast journalism struggle to balance the teaching of reporting, writing, history, ethics, and critical thinking with the technological skills demanded by the profession. They look for opportunities to teach these concepts while also honing skills needed to succeed in today's media landscape. The experiment of the Footbridge Forums started small but has grown into something with unexpected results. Educators and media specialists around the world might consider a program like this to enhance public dialogue and introduce the next generation, and perhaps some of the current generation of journalists, to a new role.

HERE COMES EVERYBODY: The Power of Organizing without Organizations

By Clay Shirky

Dana M. Walker, Reviewer

Self-described “stay-at-home moms” start meeting offline after finding each other through a social networking Web site. Teenage fans of Japanese anime use listservs to teach each other the craft of visual storytelling. Cell phone snapshots of the 2005 London transport bombings show up on a photo-sharing Web site, appearing before those of many traditional news outlets. An angry airline passenger uses her blog to help organize a national campaign for passenger rights.

From wikis to weblogs, listservs to LiveJournal, information and communication technologies are enabling new kinds of group-forming practices by making it easier for groups to self-assemble. Widely dispersed and previously unaffiliated individuals can contribute to those groups in increasing numbers without having to rely on traditional forms of organization. In his recent book, *Here Comes Everybody*, author, consultant, and teacher Clay Shirky offers observations which consider the power of technologically enabled social interaction in an era of Web 2.0.

Shirky builds his conclusions around two basic premises: humans are fundamentally social creatures with an advanced capacity for forming groups; and Internet-enabled tools are natively good at group formation. He points out that we have always relied on coordinated group effort for survival, but while we are good at banding together, groups start to get increasingly complex as they get larger. As our groups grow, it becomes impossible for everyone to interact with everyone else. If it takes effort to maintain a link between two people, maintaining links among everyone in a group of significant size rapidly becomes unsustainable. Traditionally, that challenge has been met by gathering people into organizations, particularly hierarchies of management. Such organizations lower the transaction costs for group effort. In support of this theory,

Shirky points to the economist Ronald Coase, who famously used this argument to show why markets also need firms. However, while necessary, these organizations require resources in order to function, creating a limit past which a firm's continued growth becomes too costly. The institution's dilemma, then, is that certain activities may have value, but not enough value to offset the resources necessary to pursue them in an organized way.

Things have changed. We are living in a time when there has been an increase in our ability to share, cooperate, and take collective action outside the frameworks of traditional organizations. Barriers to creating social groups have diminished, and those lowered barriers make it easier for people to organize and coordinate groups. According to Shirky, the Internet and mobile communications technologies have enabled group engagement in a way that was difficult with previous technological innovations, such as the printing press, telegraph, and broadcasting. With these previous technologies, there was a tradeoff: with telephones, it was possible to facilitate two-way communication, but difficult to create groups; through broadcasting, it was possible to communicate to a large group, but difficult to create two-way conversation. The Internet combines two-way communication with broadcasting, providing the potential for everyone in a group to talk to everyone else. Shirky notes, "The current change, in one sentence, is this: most of the barriers to group action have collapsed, and without those barriers, we are free to explore new ways of gathering together and getting things done (p.22)." The result is transformative, enabling larger, more effective groups to form that are both relatively ad hoc and nimble.

Shirky astutely points out that many of the technical tools which now enable group formation are the relatively mundane, first-generation technologies, such as email, listservs, and bulletin boards. But it is precisely because those tools have become "technologically boring" that they have become socially interesting (p.105). It isn't until a technology has sunk into our daily practices that the social effects start to be seen. In Shirky's analysis, we are at that point; many of these tools have become nearly ubiquitous, and we are starting to see profound social changes occurring as a result. It is not the case that one single tool is revolutionizing our ability to organize; it is that, when considered together, these technologies are indications of a more fundamental shift in the way we communicate with groups. Shirky writes, "Group action gives human society its particular character, and anything that changes the way

groups get things done will affect society as a whole” (p.23).

Through a series of illustrative examples, Shirky describes a “ladder of activities” that groups undertake, aided or enabled by new social tools. He argues that the first two rungs of the ladder—sharing and cooperation—are widely visible in our current culture; the third—collective action—is less common, but he expects we will see increasing efforts along those lines. Each rung on the ladder can be differentiated by the degree to which an individual has to coordinate action with the action of the group. Sharing, for example, puts the fewest demands on the participant, making it the most widespread form of activity. Cooperation, such as collaborative production (Wikipedia, for example) or conversation, is common, but requires some synchronization on the part of participants. Collective action has the fewest examples because it is the hardest to initiate and the social support required to sustain such action is still being worked out.

Shirky skillfully presents several examples to illustrate his argument. Take the case of Flickr, a photo-sharing website. Flickr allows individuals to post and share their photos, and also to label or “tag” them. When more than one participant uses the same tag, those photos and their users become linked. When thousands of these tagged contributions are aggregated, sharing becomes a way to coordinate, revealing new commonalities between similarly tagged photos and, by extension, the users who posted them. And Flickr users can do more than view photos; they can comment on them as well by providing a space to discuss, praise, or give feedback to one another. The real story of tools like Flickr is that they reverse the traditional order of group activity from “gather, then share” into “share, then gather” (p.35). This is a critical point. Flickr is the source for sharing but it does not make the sharing happen—the site does not treat particular photographic genres as the most interesting nor does it even file photographs according to a preexisting scheme. Instead, Flickr provides the means for contributors to collectively find links and thereby devise their own classification systems and their own groups.

For those of us who lived through the hype of the first “dot com” movement and its promises, a certain amount of healthy skepticism is necessary in any assessment of how the Internet is reshaping social life. But unlike some works which treat the Internet as either the savior or destroyer of social life, Shirky provides a more thoughtful discussion about the ways in which our tools of com-

munication are having an effect on the way we organize and take action. Shirky's project is not intended to give a rigorous academic assessment of social media or peer production. He also steers clear of cases that are particularly controversial (he spends little time discussing privacy, copyright, or media ownership). Instead, *Here Comes Everybody* provides an accessible discussion of the broad issues and possible impacts of social media. Shirky is at his best in weaving his examples into a larger understanding of the Internet—always insisting that any individual case is significant only when seen as part of a larger whole. While some of his insights are certainly not new, and others are somewhat dubious, his writing is crisp and perceptive, providing a needed focus not on the particular tools of the Internet, but on what people are actually doing with them.

AFTERWORD

By David Mathews

Each issue of the *Higher Education Exchange* gives the Kettering Foundation an opportunity to explain its research in the context of what others are writing about higher education and the public. We track this literature; we use the *Exchange* to share articles and books that catch our eye. We look for experiments that dig behind the abstract “public” or equally broad “democracy” and concentrate on exactly what a democratic citizenry does. As I said in the last *Exchange*, we are trying to find out what institutions of higher education are doing to increase the capacity of citizens to shape their future. We hope to learn how these institutions affect the work of citizens.

In this issue, all of the articles are about initiatives that are engaging citizens and their communities in novel ways. For example, Matthew McKinney reports on work at the University of Montana that treats citizens as problem solvers—in collaboration with governments. We are particularly pleased to be able to include an interview with a college trustee, Deborah Wadsworth. It is only the second piece from a trustee in the last 16 years, which suggests a lack of board attention to the obligation academic institutions have to our democracy. Would that the Wadsworth interview were the beginning of a countertrend!

In this year’s issue, I would like to return to a problem I touched on in 2008. Most campus engagement projects offer technical assistance and service (often provided by student volunteers). While I applaud both, I worry about the scarcity of cases of academic institutions engaged with communities in strengthening their civic capacity. Noëlle McAfee describes this as the capacity of citizens to come together as a community to “define or make itself.” The importance of this indigenous capacity has been emphasized recently in an analysis of why some communities fare better than others when hit by a natural disaster. One conclusion is that a resilient community is far more important than a well-stocked pantry. Resilience is another name for civic capacity.

Today, Kettering has a hypothesis that might explain why building resilience or civic capacity is not on the agenda of many institutions, academic as well as others. The hypothesis is that it is difficult for institutions to relate to the kind of politics that builds civic capacity and results in resilience because the process is so different from institutional politics that it isn't recognizable as politics. Democracy works at two levels, one quite visible and the other not. The institutional level is easy to see and relate to. Everyone is familiar with elections, lawmaking, and court rulings. Underneath institutional politics, however, there is another level, which we've compared to wetlands. It is far less visible as an arena for politics because the principal actors aren't politicians.

We have made the analogy to natural wetlands because they were once overlooked and unappreciated yet since have been recognized as being essential to the entire ecosystem. For example, the swamps along the Gulf Coast were filled in because developers believed the land had greater value as commercial real estate. And the barrier islands were destroyed when boat channels were dug through them because boat access was considered more valuable. The consequences were disastrous. Sea life that bred in the swamps died off, and coastal cities were exposed to the full fury of hurricanes when the barriers eroded.

The wetlands of politics are similar to swamps and barrier islands. They include informal gatherings, ad hoc associations, and the seemingly innocuous banter that goes on when people mull over the meaning of their everyday experiences. These appear inconsequential when compared with what happens in elections, legislative bodies, and courts. Yet mulling over the meaning of everyday experiences in grocery stores can be the wellspring of public decision making. Connections made in these informal gatherings can become the basis for ad hoc associations that may evolve into civic organizations. In looking at the political wetlands, we didn't find perfect democracy because there isn't such a thing. Still, we have seen ways of acting, generating power, and creating change that are unlike what occurs in institutional politics. And although different, they are as essential to institutional politics as natural wetlands are to farms and urban environments.

Recently, we have been calling these distinctive characteristics of the political wetlands "organic." (The word "organic" connotes things that are natural or found in ordinary life, things that are

human and function like living organisms.) And the structures are loose, more like blobs than squares or, in political terms, more informal than formal. Like any term, this one has its drawbacks. We don't equate organic with all that is good in politics; that would be a mistake—riots are organic. Still, we are drawn to the term, in part, because it doesn't have the varied meanings of words like "civic" and "public." *What we have found in the political wetlands is more civic than grassroots politics and more political than civil society.*

Some of the characteristics of wetland politics, which we think of as organic, may make it difficult for institutions to recognize that they are seeing politics. The most distinctive characteristic is that citizens are defined by their relationships with other citizens rather than with the state. Citizens aren't just taxpayers and voters; they are political actors in additional ways. They make things: houses for the homeless, neighborhood watches that complement the work of police departments, after-school programs for children. The relationships formed by this work aren't the same as those of family and friends, nor are they like those in institutional politics, which may be based on patronage or party loyalty. Organic relationships are pragmatic and work-related. As Clay Shirky explains, these civic relationships may develop even faster today thanks to ways of forming networks using the Internet.

We have also noticed that, in the political wetlands, the names people give to problems reflect the things they hold dear and their basic concerns—their highest hopes and deepest fears as human beings: being safe from danger, being treated fairly, having the freedom to act as they see best. The value-based names people use for problems are also different from those used by professionals and politicians, so much so that the names may not be recognized as political.

Perhaps the most significant of the organic characteristics, as far as academics are concerned, is that the knowledge citizens need in order to decide what to do about their problems is created in the cauldron of collective decision making, as Noëlle McAfee also notes. Academics tend to equate knowledge with what is learned through rigorous, objective study. Valid or expert knowledge answers questions that have only one correct answer. People also have personal knowledge that is subjective, and it is sometimes recognized by academics as valuable local knowledge. A third kind of knowledge, which has to be constructed in the public realm, responds to questions that can have more than one answer. These

are answers to questions about what *should be done* to reform the health care system or educate children. As discussed in other issues of the *Exchange*, these questions are normative and not like the ones that experts can answer, because they touch on the intangible things that humans value. To respond to these questions, we have to rely on our best collective judgment. Despite a rich literature on this sort of knowledge, from Aristotle on to Hannah Arendt, such public knowledge is not always valued but, instead, is often equated with mass opinion.

Also often overlooked from an institutional perspective are untapped resources in the wetlands that could be used to solve problems if they were recognized as such. These include the “assets” that John McKnight has found in even the poorest communities. These resources come from the skills of citizens that are magnified when people join forces. Citizens’ resources are different from institutional resources, which tend to be material and technical. And while institutions have the power of legal authority and size, the power of citizens comes from their ability to make things through their collective efforts—and from the relationships forged in these efforts.

Institutions may even misjudge the kind of learning that goes on in the political wetlands because it is collective, not just individual. When people learn as a community, they reassess their goals, not just the results. Furthermore, civic learning is more a political mode than an evaluative exercise. High-achieving communities experiment in order to learn. They investigate what others do but don’t try to copy. And they resist being lectured on what to do, which is a political mode that is often most comfortable for institutions.

Because the political wetlands appear insignificant or deficient, institutions have tended to colonize democracy at this level, remaking it in their own image. The mechanisms for doing this are familiar and well intended: empowerment projects, participatory mandates, and accountability standards. Matt Leighninger describes the results of this colonization: participatory movements that sometimes create nonparticipatory reforms. Other examples include campaigns to involve the public that try to generate support for deserving institutions (like public schools), promote better understanding of government agencies, or ensure institutional legitimacy. The goals of these campaigns are all worthy, yet they all have to do with connecting citizens to institutions. They don’t take into consideration the importance of citizens first engaging one another.

The impression that the political wetlands are deficient ultimately leads to the conclusion that they will eventually dry up and have to be refilled in some way. This mindset reinforces the tendency of institutions to *act on* the wetlands. In fact, the institutions may proceed from the assumptions that these wetlands have to be created by external interventions because they wouldn't exist otherwise. Surely political wetlands have internal forces that work against their democratic practices—prejudice, envy, greed, and the like. Yet if institutions employ a strategy of acting on the wetlands, they will not recognize opportunities for building on what grows, as one community organizer put it.

Not recognizing the political potential in the wetlands appears to be more than a matter of not seeing the wetlands. Perhaps a perceptual filter is blocking the recognition, which affects not only professionals in institutions but also citizens. When the concept of politics is totally dominated by what happens at the institutional level, the different qualities of organic politics simply may not register. Politics obscures the political, scholars have said. One of our international fellows said that, in his experience, people rarely talked about politics in countries where they are afraid of the state. On the other hand, in the marketplaces, they talked about running the village schools and coping with droughts. Yet they didn't think of these conversations as political or see the potential for building their democracy on them. In the United States, a community organizer told a similar story. In his city, people decided that youngsters in their neighborhoods needed more opportunities to spend time with adults who would take an interest in them. Yet rather than enlisting their churches and civic organizations, they wanted to turn the problem over to professional social workers. They didn't recognize their own resources.

At the foundation, we are struggling to understand how citizens and institutions come to “discover” the untapped potential in the political wetlands. This act of discovery is a form of politics in itself and an alternative to the politics of institutions acting on citizens and communities. The recognition of untapped resources leads to a politics of alignment in which the work of citizens complements the work of institutions. The example of alignment we have given before is bringing academic ways of knowing, which involve the rigorous application of scientific principles, into a complementary relationship with the public construction of the knowledge that citizens use to inform their judgment. Noëlle McAfee suggests that

while the epistemology of expert, scientific knowledge may seem at odds with the epistemology of public knowledge, the two may actually be compatible. “The experimental attitude ... begins with the idea that there is a truth waiting to be discovered,” she writes, adding that, in fact, truth often has to be invented. So she is hopeful that academic knowledge can be an ally of public knowledge. As things are now, expert knowledge can abort the creation of public knowledge. This appears to have happened in the Footbridge Forum at the University of Montana when the introduction of statistics had a chilling effect on students, who believed something more was at stake than the numbers showed.

Even though cases of academic institutions helping to build civic capacity have been hard to come by, we still think the campus civic engagement movement could be evolving in that direction. One of the most encouraging signs, which was noted in last year’s *Exchange*, is the leadership coming from the faculty. It would be an overstatement to say that all faculty are interested in community engagement (or should be). Yet something is stirring on all kinds of campuses and in many academic fields, including the sciences. Often the faculty members involved have encountered institutional and professional disincentives; still, they have persisted in trying to integrate their academic interests with their public concerns. (Recall what Matthew McKinney has to say on the subject, and reread the interview with American Studies scholar Peggy Shaffer in the 2008 *HEX*). Furthermore, the experiment at Bennington College offers some promise that the oldest of the faculties, those in the liberal arts, may return to their roots as civic arts.

At this point, we haven’t accumulated enough evidence to be able to document a major trend in the faculty, nor can we say whether these faculty initiatives go beyond technical assistance and service. We hope to have more to offer on this subject in next year’s *Exchange*. Any stories, advice, or criticism from our readers would be greatly appreciated. Also, by next year’s issue, I hope we will be in a position to say more about a particular kind of public policy institute that has been created explicitly to increase the capacity of citizens to come together as a community that can define and make itself. Seeing how people come together and do the work of a community should help clarify what it would mean for institutions to foster civic capacity without directly intervening in or acting on a community.

Finally, let me repeat an invitation to comment on any of the topics discussed in the *Exchange*. In past issues, we’ve encouraged

an exchange with our editors, David Brown and Deborah Witte. In fact, our hope that there would be such an interaction was one of the reasons for choosing the name of the journal. Our editors can be reached at dwitte@kettering.org. We also continue to use the postal services: we are at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio, 45459.

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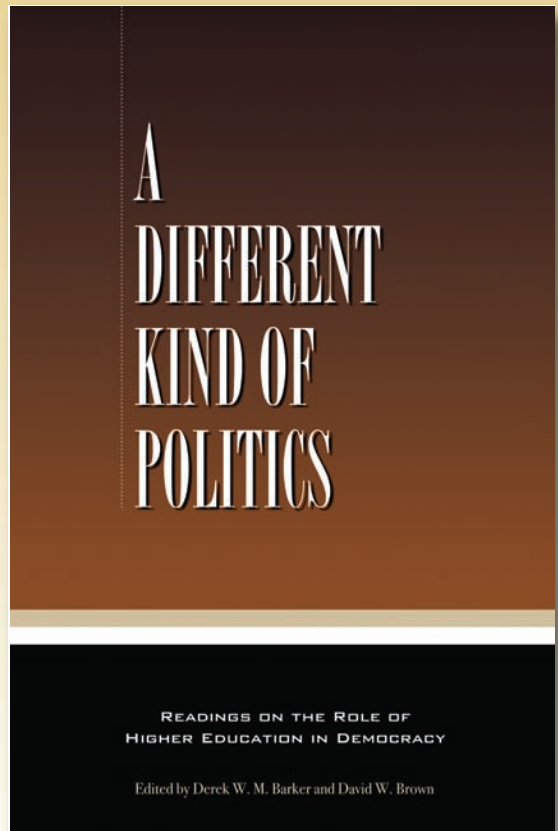
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