

**The American Democracy Project:  
Civic Engagement, Higher Education, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**A Cooperative Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU),  
*The New York Times*, and AASCU Member-Institutions**

*I know of 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. --Thomas Jefferson (1820)*

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

The American Democracy Project is a multi-campus initiative to create intellectual and experiential understandings of civic engagement for undergraduates enrolled at institutions that are members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The project, developed by AASCU in collaboration with *The New York Times*, focuses on the development of informed graduates who are committed to lives of engagement as citizens in our democracy. The project grows out of a concern about decreasing rates of participation in the civic life of America in voting, in advocacy, in local grassroots associations, and in other forms of civic engagement that are necessary for the vitality of our democracy. The goals of the project are: 1.) to increase the number of undergraduate students who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful civic actions by asking participating institutions to review and restructure academic programs and processes, extracurricular programs and activities, and the institutional culture; and 2.) to focus the attention of policy makers and opinion leaders on the civic value of the college experience. This project uses the definition of civic engagement proposed by Thomas Ehrlich and his colleagues in Civic Responsibility and Higher Education:

“Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” (Preface, page vi)

“A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.” (Introduction, page xxvi)

The project seeks to 1.) create a national conversation among many campuses about the theory and practice of civic engagement; 2.) develop institutional commitment by involving senior administrators, faculty, staff and students; by addressing core institutional mission and purpose; and by focusing on civic engagement as a learning outcome for undergraduates; 3.) initiate new projects, courses and teaching strategies, extracurricular programs, and other programs to increase civic engagement, supported by the national project office; 4.) measure the civic engagement outcomes of undergraduates on participating campuses, and assess the impact of this project in contributing to greater civic engagement outcomes; and; 5.) disseminate the models that result to a wide audience of higher education institutions, individuals, and policy makers. The project initially will involve 145 member campuses of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), representing more than 1.3 million students. The national project is directed by an officer from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities; a project co-director comes from *The New York Times*. Direction and support come from a group of presidents and chancellors that serve on AASCU’s Committee on the Undergraduate Experience; operational guidance comes from a group of chief academic officers who serve as the Implementation Committee. The project is assisted by a number of colleagues that work in civic engagement and related fields who serve on an Advisory Committee.

The basic concept of the project is a four-part approach to civic engagement, which includes initial project design and planning, a national conversation among participating campuses, implementation of a variety of civic engagement projects on each of the campuses, and a process of dissemination of best practices that will include media events and publications. Project planning has been underway for more than a year, as the project director and co-director have met with presidents and chancellors who serve on AASCU's Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, a select group of AASCU chief academic officers, and individuals and groups in the field of civic engagement.

## **INTRODUCTION: Need For The Project**

For some time now, commentators and critics have noted a decline in the degree of civic participation and engagement in American life. Decreased levels of voting, reduced levels of volunteerism, and less time spent on activities with neighbors have all been cited as examples of the decline in civic engagement in this new age. For example, in a 1987 poll of baby boomers, 77% said that the nation was worse off because of less involvement in community activities. Fifty percent of Americans in 1996 felt that we were becoming less trustworthy. In a 1999 survey conducted by Hart & Teeter, 68 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds reported that they felt disconnected from government. There is growing sense that we are losing the instincts of community that unites a nation. Ironically, in this age of cell phones, email, and instant messaging, this age of hyper-connectivity, commentators and scholars lament the loss of a feeling of community, a feeling of connectedness. This new Age of Technology, despite its innovations, is accompanied by a growing sense of disconnectedness. Robert Putnam, a key scholar on this issue, notes that far too often the old patterns of community and neighborhood have given way to separateness and isolation. Bridge clubs, community groups, and even casual neighborhood associations are all losing members. We are increasingly, in Putnam's memorable title, "bowling alone".

The danger is that our collective loss of association creates problems both for our society and for our democracy. At the precise moment in our history when immigration is swelling the number of Americans of different ethnicities and cultures, technology, work, television and other factors are separating us as neighbors and citizens. Community and neighborhood groups, along with the public schools, used to serve as agents in inculcating democratic values and ideals. These organizations and associations mentioned, link citizens from different backgrounds and

perspectives, creating a sense of collective commitment to one another in order that we as Americans could live together effectively as neighbors and as participating citizens in a democracy.

The concern about a decline in civic engagement is not simply a wistful look backwards, nor is it a nostalgic yearning for a simpler time. The loss of sense of community, and the accompanying commitment to act in support of that community, reduces the effectiveness of the community to accomplish collective goals. Furthermore, it creates a downward spiral of opportunity: a reduction in groups and organizations diminishes opportunities for citizens to act for the collective good. Putnam describes the loss of participation as a loss of “social capital,” a loss of the social networks that affect the productivity of individuals and groups. In the early years of our nation, an astute observer of America, Alexis de Tocqueville, noted that associations create positive effects on participants: “feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another.” Organizations and groups become places where people who are different interact, where forums allow ideas to be discussed and debated, and where democratic skills - running meetings, speaking in public, writing letters, and taking a position on the issues of the day – are learned.

But perhaps the greatest loss our declining civic engagement poses is the threat to our democratic institutions. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Dewey wrote that “democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” Putnam argues that “the performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital.” His study of democratic government in Italy found that regions with high levels of social capital provided a very supportive environment for democratic institutions, while regions with less social capital fared

less well. Similarly, Putnam found that in the United States, individual states with high levels of social capital developed more innovative public policy. “Politics in these states is more issue oriented, focused on social and educational services, and apparently less corrupt. Preliminary studies suggest that states high in social capital sustain governments that are more effective and innovative.” A task force of the American Political Science Association put it succinctly: “...current levels of political knowledge, political engagement, and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in the United States” (APSA Task Force on Civic Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 1989). The American Democracy project rests on a core belief...that civic engagement is critical for the preservation and vitality of American democracy. Benjamin Franklin, more than 200 years ago, reminded us of democracy’s fragility. Upon exiting the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Franklin was approached by a group of citizens; they asked what sort of government the delegates had created. His answer: "A republic, if you can keep it."

### **What Can We Do?**

The civic engagement activities of another era may be just that, activities of another era, ones not likely to be replicated in this new age. While we may lament the passing of an era, we should not try to reproduce it. Indeed, we may not be able to reproduce it in its former shapes and patterns, no matter how much we might like to. The new century before us, and this new age of technology, will produce new forms of association, new ways to organize and build communities. Yet for this American democracy to survive and flourish, new forms of civic engagement must be created, if old forms are not to be reproduced. The concern about loss of civic engagement is not nostalgia for the past but a concern for the future.

Universities and colleges have tried to respond to this concern using a variety of strategies, and today many institutions are actively involved in experiential education, service-learning, and a host of other community-involving activities. In Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility, Anne Colby and her colleagues recently documented strategies for focusing on civic engagement at 12 institutions, examining strategies in both general education and the major, in out-of-class activities, and in the culture of the institution. Other groups and organizations have also worked to advance civic engagement. Campus Compact, for example, now boasts more than 850 members. Yet despite the important work underway on many campuses, and the enormous contributions of groups like Campus Compact, a recent report by Patricia Gumpert et al. at the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) at Stanford University, entitled Beyond Dead Reckoning: Research Priorities for Redirecting American Higher Education, confirms the need for even more attention to this issue. "Higher education's performance for the most part has fallen short of fostering an engaged citizenry. Despite pockets of extraordinary activity and a growing commitment to service learning, recent evidence indicates that today's college graduates are actually less engaged in the civic life of the nation than were preceding generations. NCPI's Collegiate Results Instrument (CRI), which looked at graduates six years after they received their baccalaureate degrees, documented just how seldom recent college graduates have worked on political campaigns, engaged in communitarian activity, or translated their commitment to social justice into action."

Within AASCU institutions, there is a special need. AASCU institutions are often institutions of access, where individuals are attending as the first members of their family to ever go to college. AASCU institutions will educate a significant number of the "New Americans,"

immigrants coming from other lands. And for many, AASCU institutions have been known as the “American Dream Institutions,” where access to higher education means access to a better life. AASCU is also the most significant preparation ground for teachers: almost two-thirds of all teachers licensed each year come from AASCU institutions. While many AASCU campuses have examples of exemplary projects and efforts in civic engagement, for too many, the projects remain isolated examples, not pervasive, campus-wide efforts. Even among the most advanced civic engagement campuses, there is a need to make deeper and more profound structural, cultural, academic and service improvements that result in graduates who have both the knowledge and the commitment to remain engaged in the public life of this country.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Project on Civic Engagement initially began with 145 AASCU colleges and universities representing 1.3 million students. The project, growing out of the interests and concerns of participating institutions about this critical issue, began without any external financial support. Given the catastrophic budget cuts of the last two years, the willingness of campuses to undertake this project in this budget climate is nothing short of remarkable.

For campuses to be successful in producing students committed to civic engagement, they themselves must be models of engagement, both in the ways that they are organized and designed, and in the ways that they serve as models of engagement for their communities and regions. Furthermore, we believe that for a campus to be successful, the entire campus must be involved and committed: president, administration, staff, faculty and students. Finally, we believe that for a campus to be successful, civic engagement must be addressed in the curriculum (both general education and disciplines), in extra-curricular activities, and in the campus culture. In the curriculum, attention must be paid to both general education and the disciplines, to teaching strategies, to professional development for faculty, and to reward structures. In the extra-curricular activities, there must be attention to residence halls, groups on campus, student government, the campus newspaper, and other features of student non-academic life. The campus culture itself must reflect the commitment to civic engagement through mission statement declarations, public utterances, belief systems, policy statements and practices, and ways of interacting within the campus and with the surrounding community.

The project began with design activities that have now been underway for almost a year. In February 2002, a group of AASCU chief academic officers and staff from *The New York Times* met during a winter AASCU meeting in San Antonio to begin to outline this project. In

June, this project was discussed at a Washington, D.C. meeting of presidents and chancellors who are members of AASCU's Committee on the Undergraduate Experience. The project was further refined and developed, with assistance from John Gardner from the First Year Policy Center, at a meeting in Monterey, California, in August 2002. At that meeting, a group of 20 chief academic officers agreed to continue project development, reading critical documents and considering how to implement such a project on their own campuses. In November, the presidents and chancellors on the Committee on the Undergraduate Experience met in Naples, Florida and reviewed the work to date. In December 2002, 11 chief academic officers met at *The New York Times* building in New York to finalize the preliminary proposal. Work continued on the proposal at the February 2003 winter meeting of chief academic officers, and in meetings with Liz Hollander and the staff at Campus Compact, with Harry Boyte and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota, and with Tom Ehrlich and his colleagues at Carnegie Foundation.

The American Democracy Project offers a unique approach to the issue of civic engagement by its overall design; its plan for administrator, faculty and student involvement; its focus on assessment and learning outcomes; and its commitment to dissemination.

### **1. Overall Design:**

First, the project brings together a university presidential association (the American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU]), a national newspaper (*The New York Times*), and a set of 145 participating universities from all over the United States, representing 1.3 million students. The project will create a national conversation to develop a shared conceptual framework for all participants about what is meant by civic engagement. Participants on each campus will be linked with one another through the national project coordinators, and

supported in their local efforts by the national project office. The national project office will assume the following roles:

**Connector:** The national office will create connections with other groups and programs involved in civic engagement, build networks and coalitions of participating institutions, and link presidents, chief academic officers, other university administrators and students across multiple campuses.

**Collector and Sorter:** The national office will collect position papers, project descriptions, civic engagement statements, and the names of speakers and trainers. For many just beginning to examine the field, there is almost too much material, too many groups, too many ideas. For very busy college presidents and chief academic officers, there is a need to sift through the materials, groups and people to identify those that can be of the greatest assistance to AASCU campuses.

**Convener:** The national project office will convene meetings, using the framework of already-established meetings such as those held separately for AASCU presidents and provosts, and also arrange special regional and national meetings for all kinds of audiences.

**Reporter:** The national office will publicize the project, celebrate the accomplishments of individual members, and champion the cause of civic engagement in national forums.

**Evaluation Coordinator:** The national office will coordinate evaluations of project activities on the participating campuses, and will also organize the evaluation of the entire project.

**Disseminator:** The national office will report the work of the participating institutions in publications, news briefs, and other materials.

## **2. Institutionalization:**

A second unique feature of this project is that we will seek to institutionalize the initiative by making it a priority of the institution and its senior leaders. The project seeks to link the various campus activities begun under the auspices of this project, along with activities already underway, to campus strategic goals, mission statements, and general education outcomes.

## **3. Assessment:**

Third, the project focuses on assessment by measuring both increases in the civic engagement of undergraduates and the success of particular strategies in achieving increased levels of civic engagement. We will enlist the help of key organizations and individuals in the field, such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, CIRCLE, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and Campus Compact to assist us in developing appropriate measurement strategies.

## **Project Stages**

The project will be divided into four stages:

### **Stage One: Design Phase.**

Phase One will involve project design, concept development, and identification of participating institutions, the commitment of presidents and chancellors, and support of chief academic officers. The design phase began in February 2002 and will continue through summer 2003, involving presidents and chancellors, chief academic officers, faculty and students. AASCU national meetings for presidents/ chancellors (two per year), and AASCU national meetings for chief academic officers (two per year), along with special invitational meetings, are being used to support the planning process. For example, AASCU will support the provosts by

devoting a substantial portion of the Summer 2003 meeting for chief academic officers, scheduled for early August in Utah, to the theme of Civic Engagement and the launch of this project. The summer meeting will identify key readings and concepts, develop theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and design practical strategies that chief academic officers can use to launch a series of campus conversations with faculty. (Some campuses, in fact, are launching pilot activities in spring and fall 2003. These early adopters will inform others and provide expertise throughout the design phase.) Tom Ehrlich of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who has worked extensively in this field, will be our featured presenter, along with others in the field, such as Edward Zlotkowski, Brian Murphy, Devorah Lieberman, and Tony Chambers.

### **Stage Two: National Conversation.**

The second stage will involve a yearlong national conversation among participating institutions and on each campus. On campuses, the focus on civic engagement will be established by the president or chancellor; the chief academic officer will then convene a group of at least 20 faculty, administrators, and staff members to engage in a year-long conversation. On some campuses, the group may include student affairs professionals and other university staff, and on some campuses may also include students. Each campus will determine the make-up of their local conversation group. The conversation will be divided into two parts. During the first semester and part of the second semester, the conversation will focus on the concept of civic engagement, and will involve readings and a set of discussions, with key questions. The national implementation committee, composed of the 20 chief academic officers who have been involved with this project since its inception, will facilitate the campus conversations. This committee will provide suggested readings and key questions. The campus conversations will be

supported by perspectives from other campuses, linked together in a national network by the national project staff. The purpose of the initial conversations and project design is to build a shared theoretical and conceptual framework prior to beginning campus projects. The conversation on each campus will result in the development of a 5-year campus plan. We believe that this phase is critical. There has been rapid turnover in personnel in recent years. On some campuses, more than half the faculty will retire in the next 5-7 years. The campus conversation creates deep roots across the campus community, helping many individuals understand core concepts and begin designing context-appropriate projects and reforms. Creating an ongoing conversation will build a foundation for long-term sustainability, and will also link theory and practice.

The second semester conversation will focus on designing and developing civic engagement projects on each campus, again facilitated by the national implementation committee, AASCU and *The New York Times*. The Winter 2004 meeting of chief academic officers, in February 2004 in Tampa, Florida, will provide a civic engagement strand in its program that will allow participating campuses to focus on project ideas and possibilities as the transition is made from campus conversations about theoretical frameworks to project design and implementation. In addition, the national project office will access to a variety of print media, and connections to established groups and organizations that can be of assistance. In addition, we are currently exploring ways to create faculty and administrator workshops for Fall 2003, and Spring and Summer 2004, prior to the launch of campus projects in Fall 2004.

### **Stage Three: Project Implementation.**

In the third stage, a two-year period, campuses will implement projects designed during the national conversation. Coordination, support and assistance will be provided through the

national implementation committee. Campuses will be expected to seek long-term funding support to ensure long-term continuity and sustainability. They will be encouraged to use the national project as a lever for local fund raising.

During the first year of conversation and planning, each participating campus will conduct an inventory of civic engagement activities already underway. They will be asked to examine the formal curriculum of the university, both the general education requirements and the coursework within majors. They will also be asked to identify the out-of-class programs and activities, to see where civic engagement activities are already taking place beyond the curriculum. And finally, they will be asked to identify the culture and climate of their institutions, to determine how culture and climate contribute to or detract from civic engagement. Campuses will also be asked to identify the extent to which their various civic engagement activities are linked together in some coherent whole.

Each campus will then design a series of programs, projects, and activities that promote civic engagement, based on the findings from the campus inventory. Each campus will design its own unique set of activities, but will be informed by the scholars who serve as project consultants, and by the ideas and activities of the other participating campuses. As a minimum, we would expect that the theme of civic engagement will provide students with opportunities for study and reflection on unique features of American democracy and the core political beliefs that sustain our democracy; for study of contemporary political and social issues using *The New York Times* as a foundation text; for participation in civic activities in the local community; for reflection on their experiences in post-activity seminars that link civic engagement and service learning; and for interaction with students at other AASCU institutions across the country on matters of contemporary interest. Student writing will be required in this project, and will be

shared across participating campuses. *The New York Times* will operate an interactive web site connecting project participants to national journalists and speakers. Outstanding examples of student writing will be posted on this site. Finally, we are planning to actively engage student newspapers in this project, connecting their editors and staff with other campus student newspapers and with *The New York Times*.

The national project office will identify assessment strategies that campuses can use to measure the effectiveness of their programs. John Gardner's First Year of College Project, for example, has some strategies that may prove effective. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has questions that touch on civic engagement, and NSSE also allows the use of locally-developed questions. There are other sources of assessment as well, such as the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), which has developed a set of 19 core indicators of engagement. The national office will serve as a resource for campuses, identifying various assessment tools and gauging their effectiveness. Campuses will be asked to participate in assessment activities that measure the impact of this project in improving civic engagement outcomes. Tools that campuses can use to assess the degree to which all aspects of their campus are involved in supporting civic engagement will also be identified.

Individual campus success will be evaluated on a number of factors, including the number of faculty and staff engaged in meaningful civic engagement activities, the number of students who demonstrate increased levels of civic commitment, and the ways in which the campus demonstrates greater commitment to civic engagement goals. Factors considered in evaluating project success will include the number of campuses participating, the success of the project in supporting local campus activities, and the degree to which the work of the project is

communicated to policy makers and opinion leaders to shape their attitudes about the contributions higher education institutions make to the public good.

The national project office will continue to support the work on campuses through information dissemination, linking campuses and providing various resources. The national office will handle inquiries, develop training and reflection programs for presidents and chief academic officers, and work with others to provide training opportunities for campus teams and individuals.

**Stage Four: Dissemination.**

In the fourth and final stage, AASCU will compile and report collective statistics on project designs, number of students involved, and successful strategies that will then be disseminated to all 430 AASCU member institutions. *The New York Times* will support the dissemination effort with national reports on best practices and innovative approaches. A publication of best practices will be compiled and edited by the participating campuses.

## **PROJECT ORGANIZATION**

The project organization will include:

### **Executive Director:**

The project will be directed by George Mehaffy, a vice president at AASCU. Staff members at AASCU will provide daily operational support. AASCU will serve as the fiscal agent for the project.

### **Co-Director:**

The project will be co-directed by Felice Nudelman from *The New York Times*.

### **Guidance and Support:**

A standing committee of AASCU university presidents and chancellors, the Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, will provide broad oversight and direction for policy and project design. The Committee will be asked to review overall structure and design, project activities, and assessment.

### **Implementation Committee:**

A group of 16 AASCU chief academic officers who have been involved in this project from its inception will serve as the Implementation Committee. They will be concerned with operational issues as well as broad project goals. The Implementation Committee will meet twice a year at the regularly scheduled meetings of AASCU chief academic officers, and at other times as needed.

### **Advisory Committee:**

The Advisory Committee consists of individuals working in the field of civic engagement and related fields. They will be used to provide expertise for project initiatives, and also linkages between their own projects and the American Democracy Project.

## **Unique Features of This Project**

The leadership of the president or chancellor: For civic engagement to become established as a goal of an institution, the leadership of the president or chancellor is critical. While presidents and chancellors are increasingly required to address issues away from campus, their commitment and support is crucial for the development of institutional goals and directions. Yet the project also recognizes that the daily work of implementation cannot be expected of the campus leader, so the project links the commitment of the president or chancellor to the work of the chief academic officer.

The leadership of the chief academic officer: Far too often, civic engagement has been a symbolic commitment of a campus, not fully realized by campus participants, especially faculty. In other cases, individual faculty have been involved in their own projects but those projects have not become campus priorities. This project will ask the chief academic officer, as the academic leader of the campus, to establish civic engagement as a campus priority, creating an active faculty group to design and carry out local projects and programs. The project will also provide professional development and support, critical for many chief academic officers who do not have a background in this subject area.

A focus on faculty: A key to institutionalization is not only to look at mission statements and institutional commitments, but also to focus on faculty as the key agents in institutionalization. With the rapid retirement of the faculty workforce that was hired in the 1960s, many campuses are witnessing a 50% or 60% turnover in a matter of 4 or 5 years. A new generation of faculty has to engage in a deep and substantive conversation about civic engagement before they begin projects with students or incorporate civic engagement content into their courses. In addition to directly working with faculty, the project will also ask

participating campuses to examine hiring practices, to ensure that they reflect the commitment to civic engagement. Promotion, tenure, and reward structures must be considered and re-designed to foster support for civic engagement. Professional development programs must be put in place to address both the theory and practice of civic engagement. Without a clear focus on faculty and the creation of support systems for them, this project will not succeed. Yet on many campuses, the conversation and subsequent projects will extend well beyond the faculty to include student affairs, staff, students, board members, and the community.

A focus on leadership: This project will focus on leadership at every point in the sequence. Presidents and chancellors will examine how to best provide campus leadership on this project. Chief academic officers will be engaged in leadership training and development to help them to be effective in working with faculty. Faculty will be consciously considering leadership issues to assist them as they design programs and projects for students. And many programs and projects will consciously incorporate leadership perspectives and strategies for students.

A unique set of institutions: This project will focus on public colleges and universities that belong to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). These institutions have been called the “American Dream” institutions, for many of them educate less affluent, first generation college students, as well as immigrants, and students transferring from community colleges. AASCU institutions are closely tied to their local communities: they are focused on the economic development of their communities and the majority of their students do not go far from home despite out-of-state students and robust international programs. Finally, AASCU institutions educate almost two-thirds of the new teachers hired in America’s public

schools each year, so this project will have an impact beyond the students themselves, as graduates from these institutions work with children in America's public schools.

Coordination by a national presidential association: the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), a presidential association of 430 public institutions in the United States, representing more than 3.4 million students, will coordinate the project. Having AASCU, a national association with the capacity to work directly with university presidents and chancellors, manage this project will ensure widespread campus involvement. The association will use the extensive networks of presidents/chancellors and chief academic officers, the national meetings scheduled each year, and the publications of the association to carry out this project and disseminate its results.

A unique national partner, a national newspaper: The project will be supported by a partnership with *The New York Times*. *The Times* will be an integral part of the project, as issues and questions of civic life in contemporary America are best portrayed through newspapers. *The New York Times* will have three critical roles. First, *The Times* will participate in the overall design of the project, offering a powerful but different lens thru which to view issues of civic engagement. Second, *The Times* will work with campuses to develop innovative programs that encourage thoughtful dialogue and active engagement in contemporary issues. For example, *The Times* and a campus partner have developed a project for freshmen biology students, where the laboratory manual is *The New York Times*. The issues each week in the lab focuses on a biology question in the newspaper, and asks what biology a student needs to know, not to be a biologist or even a biology major, but to be an informed citizen. Third, *The Times* will use its resources to link far-flung and sometimes remote campuses together in a national conversation, and will provide journalists and commentators as part of that conversation. *The Times* will create a

special website with a variety of features including threaded conversations, relevant materials, a place for guest commentary by college presidents, and presentations of student writing. The site will also provide access for participants to interact with correspondents regarding coverage of issues and news analysis. *The Times* will also use its national “voice” to disseminate project ideas and promising practices, to publicize the work of the project, and to challenge the public perception that college has only vocational benefits.

A national conversation: Presidents, chief academic officers, faculty and students will be linked together among campuses as the project moves forward, allowing ideas to flow freely from campus to campus, as well as among faculty and students on each campus. This national conversation will also allow creative and innovative ideas and best practices to be widely disseminated, both through *The New York Times* and through the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).

A project of scale: Most civic engagement projects involve one or a few courses and a limited set of faculty members. This project reaches an enormous number of campuses, chief academic officers, faculty and students. The scale of the project is unprecedented. The institutions that have signed up to be part of this program represent a total of 1.3 million students.

Attention to assessment: This project will seek the best measurement tools and devices available anywhere. Participating campuses will begin by completing a campus inventory that will assess how much attention is already paid to civic engagement on campus. Campuses that join this project also will agree to measure their learning outcomes and share the results with others, so that the entire network of 100 institutions can learn together.

## **Selection Process:**

What has been required for campuses to participate?

- ✓ First, presidents or chancellors were asked to make an explicit commitment to this project, and agree to support the project for three years. They were asked to make public statements of support for this project.
- ✓ Campuses were asked to review their mission statements and other institutional goal statements, and to include a statement about the civic outcomes of college for students in those statements.
- ✓ Campuses were asked to conduct an inventory of civic engagement activities already underway on their campuses.
- ✓ Chief academic officers were asked to lead conversations with faculty and to be campus champions for civic engagement.
- ✓ Campuses were asked to participate in a national conversation about civic engagement theory and practice.
- ✓ Campuses were asked to initiate a wide variety of civic engagement projects and programs...within the curriculum, in non-academic campus activities, and in reshaping the campus culture and climate.
- ✓ Campuses were expected to seek funding from multiple sources for local projects.
- ✓ Campuses were expected to participate in assessment activities, and to share successful strategies with other campuses.

## **SUMMARY**

If successful, this project will realize two goals. First, participating institutions will refocus their efforts, making much more explicit their public purpose in creating civic engagement outcomes for students. They will be intentional in their purpose to produce citizens. To do that, they will develop a deep understanding of what civic engagement is, and how colleges and universities can foster civic engagement for students through well-planned programs, courses, and experiences. They will implement a wide variety of activities and programs designed to increase civic engagement among undergraduates. And they will systematically measure their success in producing civically engaged graduates.

Perhaps equally important, as these institutions redefine themselves, they will seek to promote that expanded vision of themselves to others in the larger community. For too long now, there has been a growing perception that college is only a private good, benefiting only the individual who graduates. College has often been seen as narrowly vocational, focused on creating individuals who can have successful careers. Colleges must characterize their work, to themselves and their publics, as the work of citizenship development. Colleges must be seen as contributing to the public good of this nation.

If this nation is to continue to be successful as the world's oldest democracy, its colleges and universities must have, as one of their most important roles, the creation of informed, active citizens, as capable of participating in this democracy as in this economy. Only then we will be able to meet Franklin's challenge to preserve our republic.