Through the Lens of Civic Learning—
How to Incorporate
Civic Learning Principles
into Your Higher Ed Coursework

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FIGURE 5. Goals for Higher Education, 1947

“The President’s Commission on Higher Education has attempted to select, from among the principal goals for higher education, those which should come first in our time. They are to bring to all the people of the Nation:

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

“Education is by far the biggest and the most hopeful of the Nation’s enterprises. Long ago our people recognized that education for all is not only democracy’s obligation but its necessity. Education is the foundation of democratic liberties. Without an educated citizenry alert to preserve and extend freedom, it would not long endure.”

Source: President’s Commission on Higher Education (1947a).
The Three Cs

- College
- Career
- Citizenship
A Framework for Twenty-First-Century Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

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

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

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

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

Fig. 1, A Crucible Moment, p. 4; Civic Prompts, p. 5.
What Would a Civic-Minded Campus Look Like?

CIVIC ETHOS governing campus life

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

CIVIC LITERACY as a goal for every student

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

CIVIC INQUIRY integrated within the majors and general education

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

CIVIC ACTION as lifelong practice

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

1. Foster a civic ethos across all parts of campus and educational culture
2. Make civic literacy a core expectation for all students
3. Practice civic inquiry across all fields of study
4. Advance civic action through transformative partnerships, at home and abroad

Key Recommendations for Educational and Policy Leaders

1. Make civic learning for democratic engagement an expected component of program integrity and quality standards at all levels
2. Make demonstrated achievement in civic learning—US and global—an integral part of quality assurance and public accountability at all levels
## Figure 6. From Partial to Pervasive: Constructing More Advanced Levels of Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement in Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partial foundation laid...</th>
<th>Civic learning is pervasive...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic learning is optional for some students</td>
<td>Civic learning is expected for all students, regardless of field or area of study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic learning is a one-time experience</td>
<td>Civic learning is infused across students’ educational experiences over time in a developmental arc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching critical thinking does not consider real-world contexts</td>
<td>Teaching critical thinking also occurs in relation to issues of public significance</td>
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<td>Civic learning is individually oriented</td>
<td>Civic learning also fosters collaboration with diverse people and groups</td>
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<td>Civic learning focuses on external engagement</td>
<td>Civic learning also asks students to reflect on their own social identity and location as well as those of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty in some disciplines and certificate programs raise civic questions in relation to their field</td>
<td>Faculty in all disciplines and certificate programs raise civic questions in relation to their field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community-based scholarship is accepted in some departments</td>
<td>Community-based scholarship is positively viewed in all departments and influences the hiring and promotion of faculty</td>
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<td>Civic learning practices in the curriculum and cocurriculum are parallel but not integrated</td>
<td>Civic learning practices in the curriculum and cocurriculum are coordinated and connected through partnerships between academic and student affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community engagement is one-directional, with colleges and universities providing expertise to the community</td>
<td>Community engagement is reciprocal, with colleges/universities and communities working together to identify assets and solve public problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission and vision statements do not explicitly address civic responsibility</td>
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