1-1-2010

Academic Excellence and Civic Engagement: Constructing a Third Space for Higher Education

Nancy Cantor
Syracuse University, ncantor@syr.edu

Academic Excellence and Civic Engagement:
Constructing a Third Space for Higher Education

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor and President
Syracuse University[1]

The Case for Civic Engagement

In times of crisis, our nation historically has turned to higher education to find a way forward. Indeed, a publicly focused mission for higher education was formally embedded in the Morrill Act of 1862 that laid the foundation for our national system of state colleges and universities[2]

In the aftermath of World War II, the GI Bill sent more than 8 million students to college. After the launch of Sputnik, Congress doubled the appropriation for the National Science Foundation and fostered a multitude of academic careers through the National Defense Education Act.

Once again, the times demand that higher education play a transformative role. The full range of our disciplines can and must combine to make a difference. As Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution has observed, the Great Recession "has unveiled an economy dangerously out of whack, frenzied with consumption, wasteful in its use of energy, more adept at increasing inequity than sharing prosperity."[3]

In such a world, as Martha Nussbaum wrote this month, the future of democracy itself will depend on our ability to educate "complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements."[4]

It's true that we must have technology, science, commerce, and innovation, but they are not sufficient, in and of themselves. They must be embedded in a humanistic landscape that fully accounts for culture, history, and difference, and that strives to

---

[1] Keynote address delivered at the Association of American Colleges and Universities Conference on Faculty Roles in High-Impact Practices, March 25, 2010.
[2] U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, Morrill Act (1862) online at http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=33
[3] Bruce Katz, "Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings," (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, February, 2020) presented at a conference *Universities and Medical Centers in Older Industrial Cities: Leading the Transition to the Next Economy*, at Washington University in St. Louis, Feb. 16-17, 2010.
[4] Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Liberal Arts Are Not Elitist," *The Chronicle Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 March, 2010, p. A88.

reduce inequality, spread opportunity, and strengthen community. As Harry Boyte recalled several years ago in a lecture at the University of Michigan, it was John Dewey who said that, "Democracy must be reborn in each generation. Education is the midwife."[5]

Yet last year's AAC&U study of the climate for civic responsibility on campus revealed a paradox now facing higher education. More than 90 percent of 33,000 faculty, students, and campus professionals agreed that an essential goal of higher education is to prepare students to contribute to the community. However, many of them also said they "didn't have time" in their crowded class schedules, their teaching loads, or their efforts to get tenure. They regard civic engagement as "an extra," something they can't really afford.

Tonight, borrowing a motto from the *Schools of Promise* in Syracuse, I want to make the case that civic engagement is not one more thing on the plate. It *is* the plate.[6] If we are to pursue our vision of higher education as a public good, with broad benefits for our knowledge society—especially for the understanding and practice of democracy, social justice, and peace—civic engagement must be at the heart of things. And it should be broader than "service" or even service learning, affecting a wide range of disciplines and orienting whole institutions, though not necessarily everyone in them, toward having tangible impact on the pressing issues—the "grand challenges"—facing our diverse, networked, increasingly collaborative and globalized world.[7]

Building a Third Space of Engagement

In this regard, I join with many of you in conceptualizing our universities as anchors in our communities – not the only anchors but pivotal organizations that share substantial responsibility for the future prosperity of a region, a city, or a community, at home or across the world. Institutions that can not only model from afar the inclusive practices befitting our diverse democracy but those that engage as agents of transformation; getting right in the mix of our challenging times.[8] This vision of universities as civically-engaged anchors, by definition, expands campus boundaries by drawing upon multiple communities of experts from different sectors of our society—academic, corporate, non-profit, governmental, cultural, and community, to

---

[5] For a full discussion, see Harry C. Boyte, "A Different Kind of Politics: John Dewey and the Meaning of Citizenship in the 21st Century, Dewey Lecture, University of Michigan, November 1, 2002.

[6] This is an adoption of a motto that Syracuse Professors of Education, George Theoharis and Julie Causton-Theoharis use to describe the role of inclusion in their innovative elementary school model, *Schools of Promise*.

[7] See a discussion by Sidonie Smith, President of the MLA, in the newsletter of the Modern Language Association online at http://www.mla.org/fromthepres.

[8] See the *Anchor Institution Task Force*, organized by Ira Harkavy of the Netter Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

name just a few. It requires what I'd call a shared "third space" where talented people from many backgrounds with diverse expertise and perspectives can collaborate.

A "third space"—real or metaphorical—lets us forge outward-looking connections to co-produce vital knowledge and innovation. One might imagine it as a two-way street for teaching, learning, and discovery. It incorporates new voices, builds trust, and transforms the history of one-way engagement between universities and their communities. No longer can "we" position ourselves as the only legitimate experts, telling others how to fix their problems or using their communities as laboratories with little benefit to them. Together, instead, we can and do create a shared sense of community and communal responsibility.

We also demonstrate to our stakeholders that civic engagement is not only a good idea, but also mission critical in a world that is far too inclined to view the prosperity of different groups as a zero-sum game: Their win is our loss.

And if we succeed, we will construct what the social-legal theorist, Susan Sturm has called an "*architecture* of inclusion," thinking carefully about how we can build and give substance and solidity to the inclusive communities and democratic culture befitting a diverse society,[9] how we can enable and support difficult dialogues across the fault lines of our world.

Universities as Anchors

This expansive version of civic engagement exists now at a number of colleges and universities, Syracuse University among them. Our vision is one of *Scholarship in Action*. Broadly defined, it's the pursuit of academic excellence, teaching, learning, and discovery through reciprocal and sustained engagements between the university and its many constituent communities. At the heart of Scholarship in Action is an orientation toward the world and our interdependence with it and place in it, including most particularly our own community, the City of Syracuse, but also extending across our region and globally.

This is true from a discovery perspective, as we work on engaging pressing issues of our time.

This is true from an education perspective as *we prepare students for the world, in the world*; embedding their learning in the midst of community and of these pressing issues, as well as in their disciplines.

---

[9] Susan Sturm, "The Architecture of Inclusion: Interdisciplinary Insights on Pursuing Institutional Citizenship," 29 *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender* 247 (2006) 248-334.

And this is true from a community engagement perspective, as we work across sectors—creating shared communities of experts—between scholars and citizens, scientists and artists, students and teachers, not-for-profits and businesses, public agencies and private institutions.

Importantly, the voices at the table in our communities of experts now often include those who have sometimes felt relegated to the margins of our campus community, and can now more easily move toward the center of these projects because, as George Sanchez has observed, they often begin with more "standing" in the surrounding community and on the pressing issues at hand.[10]

This is true not only of some of our own faculty and students, especially for those from historically under-represented groups in the academy, but also for the residents, artists, and entrepreneurs in the many challenged neighborhoods of our city and region who are also working to get a foothold in this knowledge economy. Diverse communities of experts have far more chance of making progress on what ails our communities than does any one group, disciplinary gathering, or sector alone.

Accordingly, as we think at Syracuse University about our vision of Scholarship in Action and about how to be a productive anchor institution in the City of Syracuse, we've set some criteria for the university's major investments and involvement.

- Our major projects are frequently large in scale, multi-disciplinary, and complex in partners to match the magnitude of the issues at hand.

- They engage our faculty and students in work that furthers their disciplines while also addressing pressing issues of the city.

- They draw (as a magnet would) collaborators from all sectors—business, neighborhoods, government, schools, not-for-profits.

- We want a strong synergy between the "work" of the campus and the "work" of the community to ensure that our collaborations are sustainable, that they are far more than one-shot service learning projects.

- We want projects that can dramatically increase the creative engagement of campus and community, that can build a third space that eventually changes how Syracuse looks and functions. We have kept an eye toward taking down the barriers—both real and symbolic—that divide people and prevent progress.

[10] George Sanchez, *Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy, Paper presented at The John Dewey Lecture*, University of Michigan, October, 2004.

- We want this discourse to change from one of service to one of collaboration, co-creation, and continuous civic action.

Scholarship in Action and the Near Westside Initiative

Although Syracuse University is engaged in Scholarship in Action throughout our region, tonight I'd like to describe how it's evolving in one area of our city, the Near Westside, where all our strategies come into play.

The Near Westside was once a booming manufacturing area, with rail yards, factories, and neighborhoods of working families, but as Syracuse was de-industrialized and depopulated, it was one of the worst hit. It's now the ninth poorest census district in the United States, a multi-racial and multi-ethnic population of 8,400 people on 500 acres of land.

The Near Westside is only a short walk from downtown but is cut off by West Street, a major six-lane arterial road, and hidden behind ugly railroad trestles and an array of abandoned warehouses, fences, and vacant lots, a visual barrier some describe as the "Berlin Wall."

On the other side of West Street is the Syracuse University Warehouse, once windowless and ugly but transformed by the architect Richard Gluckman into a beautiful center for design, architecture, arts journalism, and innovation. It forms the western anchor of another ongoing Scholarship in Action initiative, the Connective Corridor, an urban pathway that begins at the university and runs through the city along a route of cultural venues, parks, public memory projects, and technology.

I should mention that Syracuse is a city with powerful and progressive political and cultural traditions. Historically, our region was a cockpit for the struggle for abolition, women's rights, civil rights, and the rights of indigenous people. It was also a center of the arts & crafts movement and home to hundreds of well-known artists, writers, musicians, and innovators. Those traditions are still alive.

The Warehouse and the Corridor have already begun to spark growth that includes housing, retail, galleries, restaurants, and offices. Last year King & King, the oldest architectural firm in New York State, moved its headquarters to a former factory and warehouse on West Street. O'Brien & Gere, a major engineering firm, is constructing a new office building nearby.

Still, the battered "Berlin Wall" of the Near Westside lies just six lanes of traffic away, and it's been hard not to dream about possibilities for this neighborhood, too. As

the scientist and public intellectual Freeman Dyson said in *The New York Times*, "The purpose of thinking about the future is not to predict it, but to raise people's hopes."[11]

As a venue for Scholarship in Action, the Near Westside fits our strengths, our academic interests, and critically important social issues: environmental sustainability; arts, design, and technology; economic and cultural entrepreneurship; and inclusive education. It offers opportunities for a project that is complex in scope and large in size.

We have found willing partners in private foundations, businesses, not-for-profit corporations, state and city officials, and neighborhood residents. Together, on an ongoing basis, we have committed and leveraged resources and expertise in a not-for-profit corporation, the Near Westside Initiative, Inc. This includes a very diverse group of individuals and organizations. SU students and staff have joined with faculty from a long list of departments: architecture, design, entrepreneurship, anthropology, sculpture, law, and engineering are only a few.

We are working with the Gifford Foundation, which has strength and expertise in community organizing and developing human resources, and with two regional consortia. that link the university, corporate, and community sectors. One of these is the Syracuse Campus-Community Entrepreneurship Initiative, or e*nitiative* underwritten by a grant to six campuses in our area from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. The other is the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems.

Other key partners are the non-profit organization Home HeadQuarters, working to increase home ownership in a community where 82 percent of the residents are tenants, and Syracuse Say Yes to Education, a district-wide school reform collaboration that seeks to alter the life course of all 21,000 children in our city schools by providing the academic, socio-emotional, health, legal, and financial supports to dramatically increase the rate at which they attend college.

As part of the Near Westside Initiative, neighborhood residents meet together once a month, in gatherings that usually draw about 70 people, and our board of directors is so diverse that you'll find the president of the tenants' association from the public housing projects sitting across the table from one of the city's most prominent attorneys, and they're talking with each other, disagreeing with each other, and listening to each other passionately enough that things are getting done. The ongoing dialogue, talking across difference, is an essential part of the creativity, the energy, and the authenticity of the process.

Through these collaborations, in which there are shifting arrays of partners, depending on both immediate and long-term goals, we are committed to reviving the

[11] Quoted by Mark Robbins, "A Message from the Dean," Syracuse Architecture News, Spring 2009, 02.

neighborhood, educating students, and pushing the frontiers of scholarship. In an effort such as this, students become leaders, scholars become collaborators, and the community is continually energized by new ideas.

Envisioning the SALT District

As a starting place, the Near Westside Initiative identified a series of blocks with empty factories and warehouses near West Street and an adjacent area the shape of a "horseshoe" around an elementary school and a city park. We call it the SALT District, an acronym for Syracuse, Art, Life, and Technology that also has historical meaning. The neighborhood was once home to a salt works, and Syracuse has been referred to as The Salt City from its very early days. We believe that the arts, as well as technology, can play a vital role in reviving the life of our city, and we hope to attract newcomers to join at least 90 artists and musicians who are already working in studios in the SALT District.

The Near Westside Initiative began by purchasing empty warehouses along West Street while Home HeadQuarters, aided by Federal grants, bought more than 70 dilapidated residential properties for renovation. Some of these are fixed up and on the market. Others are for sale for a dollar to buyers who can renovate them and promise to live in them. Home HeadQuarters is working to make first-time home ownership possible for those already living in the neighborhood.

The goal is not to gentrify the neighborhood, but to revitalize it for the benefit of existing residents, with new jobs and businesses, beautiful public spaces, quality schools, and expanded opportunities for home ownership. We'll preserve the historic architecture whenever possible while incorporating the latest energy-saving green technology. Syracuse often takes the honors as the snowiest city in the continental United States, so it's the perfect test bed for issues of weatherization.

A Changing Landscape

Mark Robbins, Dean of the School of Architecture, has been a driving force in bringing the expertise of designers and architects to bear in the Near Westside, incorporating Peter Eisenmann's vision of "a place to foster intellectual exchange among practitioners, students, and those interested in architecture's role in contemporary society."[12]

SU architecture students have already designed and helped build a new single-family prefabricated home that has replaced a vacant, dilapidated house on the Near

[12] Robbins (2009).

Westside. It was the first design-build project in the history of the architecture school, and the design is innovative, cost-effective, sustainable, and energy efficient. The students worked closely with Lea Ciavarra and Anne Marie Lubrano of the firm of *lubrano ciavarra design* in Brooklyn. They also participated in local code enforcement meetings, helped negotiate final pricing, and coordinated with the modular homebuilder who built 80 percent of the house off site. When the six modules of Link House were delivered last July by a 90-ton crane, it was the first time such a crane had been seen in that part of the city for many, many years.

The warehouse redevelopment part of the Initiative has been led by staff members and volunteers from the Near Westside Board, local attorneys, and businesspeople seeking tenants, leases, and financing. This has been a huge effort in a depressed economy with scarce resources, made possible in part by the university, which dedicated expertise not only in design and green technology, but in finance and entrepreneurship as well.

One turn-of-the-century brick warehouse is being completely renovated to qualify for a LEED Platinum rating, the highest from the U.S. Green Building Council. Another will eventually house condominiums for artists and entrepreneurs and become the home of WCNY, the region's public broadcasting station. And at the same time, groups of faculty at SU, from the Writing Program and the Program in Latino and Latin American Studies are working with community residents to find space in the neighborhood for a Writers' House and a cultural center, La Casita, respectively.

On one of these warehouses, the former Case Supply Building, you can see large-scale self-portraits by students from three city schools in an exhibition called "The Best Part of Us." They were created during a course in Literacy, Community, and Photography taught by Stephen Mahan, an instructor of art photography in the Department of Transmedia in our College of Visual and Performing Arts.

The course is a partnership with the Syracuse City School District and the Partnership for Better Education that now includes 40 SU students and 200 city school students, many of them immigrants and some refugees, who photograph their own lives and use these images as catalysts for verbal and written expression.

The university students embedded in these classes are reading about issues of race, class, politics, and urban education—as well as photography—and taking photographs of their own lives. As they share these back and forth with the public school students, they all begin to see themselves, their culture, and their world through a different lens.

One of the most dramatic examples—and there are many—came from a second grader, a refugee from Darfur. When asked to start out by drawing a portrait of herself, she handed in a page showing only a tree. Her entire family had been murdered by the

Janjaweed, and she explained that she was hiding behind the tree. Two weeks into the course, she'd revised the picture, drawing herself in the center. Being able to share her stories had given her—and Mahan and his students—a new way of looking.

There is little doubt that Mahan's course would be this powerful experience for both the children and our college students, no matter where he taught it. Yet, my point tonight is that where it is *placed* here—at the heart of an ongoing, collaborative effort in democracy and social action—the Near Westside Initiative—gives it a special force in the lives of all the participants. In particular, it emphasizes place, hope, and sustainability, making the experience a platform for many more experiences, an enduring stepping off point for civic engagement and social responsibility. It is that durability that makes this education special.

Seeing a Community through a Different Lens

Stephen Mahan is fond of quoting Sir Ken Robinson, that our schools are "filled with brilliant kids who think they're not." And I would add that our colleges and universities are filled with students who are not even close to exercising their full talents for inquiry, creativity, and empathy, and who are unaware of their deep capacities for action and discovery.

Among those who *are* asked to tap into these precise capacities are the students in the communications design management class taught by Professors Rod Martinez and Bill Padgett. Each Spring, they take on a client outside the university. In recent years, they've designed museum exhibitions, way-finding systems, a history-based playground, and last year a corporate identity project for JP Morgan Chase.

Two years ago, the class partnered with Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association on a booklet highlighting the historical character of the Near Westside in an effort to maintain pride in the neighborhood and market it to newcomers. This year the communications design class is back in the neighborhood at the request of Marilyn Higgins, the university's vice president who oversees our role in both the Connective Corridor and the Near Westside, and Maarten Jacobs, director of the Near Westside Initiative. They asked the class to come up with ideas for "branding" the SALT District, creating symbols that might give it a visual identity.

Since then, teams of students have been going to the community, looking around, talking to residents, and trying to capture the spirit of the place. In the process, they've seen the big problems—like poverty—and smaller but important problems—such as their own inability to speak Spanish—that many of them hadn't encountered firsthand. They've come to appreciate the importance of places that define informal but critical

neighborhood connections, such as occur here in local churches and Nojaim Brothers, the neighborhood supermarket.

As they've looked for places to put posters, banners, or way-finding signs, they've discovered that public trash cans are scarce—they could locate only four—and they've found themselves imagining beautification schemes for underpasses and cyclone fences topped with razor wire. Each time, they've come back to campus with new questions. Why does the inner city have so many fences? Why do you need to put them around vacant lots? Why should there be such differences between public and private spaces? What do fences mean, anyway?

At the end of the semester, the students will complete their assignment, suggest designs that will be up to the best professional standards, and present their work to the Near Westside Initiative. The entire community—and potential donors—will be invited to see it in the hope they'll like it and that some or all of it can actually be made and become part of the community.

Meanwhile, the students and their professors talk about social issues, design issues, and project management issues almost every day. If you ask Professors Padgett and Martinez how it's going, they'll tell you it's not always pretty, but original and wonderful—"just like jazz," they'll say.

Art, Architecture, and Green Technology

Scholarship in Action on the Near Westside is also deeply involved in efforts to create and understand green technology and sustainability. In this, the major player is the Center of Excellence, which has a focus on indoor environmental quality, water resources, and clean and renewable energy. Ed Bogucz, Professor of Engineering at SU and Director of the Center, thinks the SALT District offers chances to work on "the grand challenge of sustainability."

Like many other neighborhoods and cities across the country, the Near Westside was "essentially thrown away," he says, and "humanity simply can't throw away neighborhoods and hope to survive on the planet." The Center successfully applied to the U.S. Green Building Council to have the Near Westside designated a pilot in the council's project to develop a LEED rating system for whole neighborhoods.

In a combined effort, Home HeadQuarters is offering homeowners the chance to get grants to improve their homes, and the Center of Excellence is paying for energy audits. One of the 33 houses in this program needed a new furnace, and the Center wanted a chance to test the performance of a Freewatt Furnace that makes electricity and

heat at the same time. Although early results suggest that this is not a technology every home should have, the homeowner likes it and will get to keep it.

In collaboration with the Center of Excellence, the School of Architecture's UPSTATE Institute sponsored a design competition, "From the Ground Up," to create innovative green homes that could be prototypes of the most advanced green technology and good design and still be affordable in communities like the Near Westside. The three winners, designed by some of nation's most prominent architects, have all found buyers.

Law Professor Deborah Kenn of the SU Community Development Law Clinic is working to revitalize the economy of the Near Westside by developing a legal framework for resident-owned enterprises. She and the student attorneys are researching innovative models throughout the country as they can be creatively applied to New York law. Professor Kenn has a longstanding scholarly interest in alternative forms of ownership that allow low income people to access property rights.

What is perhaps most striking about all of these projects is the way that innovation in science and technology, art and design combine here with law and entrepreneurship to not only cross academic disciplines but to create spaces and places where social and cultural and human boundaries can be crossed as well. The discovery and education on the Near Westside combines scholars and students and citizens—"experts of all stripes"—and takes place in this powerful social and human landscape, creating a place that is moving from suffering and barriers to hope and sustainability.

Educating and Empowering Students

Professor Marion Wilson, a sculptor working on community initiatives in our School of Education, is teaching a class that encompasses this process. She initiated a program called "Social Sculpture," named after the concept put forward by Josef Beuys, to teach students that sculpture is not only object making - but can also be thought, experience and how we mold and shape the world.

Wilson's class on Tully Street in the Near Westside, "Social Sculpture, 601 Tully," is transforming a former drug house opposite an elementary school from a dangerous neighborhood eyesore into a sustainable storefront and art/literacy community center. They are doing this in collaboration with community experts of all backgrounds and ages, from the most powerful to the most vulnerable.

This is part of a new genre of public art first described by Suzanne Lacy,[13] who argued that "what exists in the space between the words *public* and *art* is an unknown relationship between the artist and audience that may *itself* be the artwork."[14] In one of the class readings, Miwon Kwon notes that this genre defines public art "not in terms of material objects but by the ephemeral process of interaction between the local participants and the artists."[15] It encourages community-coalition building, she says, and seeks to involve the audience directly in the art itself, as subjects or—even better—as producers.[16]

For the past year, Wilson's graduate and undergraduate students, mostly from architecture and art, have collaborated with students and teachers from Fowler High School, also on the Near Westside, as clients, design partners, building collaborators, and eventual co-managers of a small business to be housed in the storefront.

The high school students come to class, do the assigned readings, serve as "experts" on the community's likes and dislikes, and often provide a reality check. Early in the semester, when the SU students were discussing the feasibility of a wall covered with vines for insulation, Troy Hamlin, one of the high school students protested that many of the houses in the neighborhood already looked like that, overgrown with weeds. Why did they want another one?

On another night, as they discussed an assigned reading, Troy asked the SU students in the class if someone could take a few minutes to explain Hegel. Then, during a hearing in the City Council Chambers, this same high school student—who has never been able to bring himself to write a single paragraph about the project for his school newspaper—stood up and made a long and eloquent plea to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

In the near future, the house on Tully Street, the green houses, the dollar houses, and the warehouse renovations will be completed, and we are hoping for more jobs, more people, and more opportunities to come on the Near Westside. Through Scholarship in Action, the experiments in green technology will contribute to the sustainability of the planet, and the cultivation of the children in the community and the students in our university will build the kind of world these times demand—from us and from all of higher education.

---

[13] For a full discussion, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004, 100-117.

[14] Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys, in Lacy, ed. *Mapping the Terrain, New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994) 20, cited by Kwon (2004) 105.

[15] Kwon, 104.

[16] Kwon, 105.

Realities, Resistance, and Possibilities

Finally, tonight, let me return to the paradox identified in the results of AAC&U's poll on civic engagement in the academy. For, as important as I believe this work is for us to do, at the same time, we need to be realistic about the demands that such new, high impact practices make on our students, faculty, and other members of the campus community.

On the part of faculty members, we recognize that scholars are connected to the systems of value—the micro-economies—of their disciplines, and that many current faculty members have identities that are built on long-entrenched understandings of what "counts" as scholarship.[17] Civic engagement requires additional skills and credentials, including capacities for sharing and negotiating different perspectives of good and bad, right and wrong. It tests our notions of who is a scholar and what scholarship is.

At some point, the results of collaborative learning and discovery can and do take forms that look quite different from the standard peer-reviewed article. This, in turn, requires that universities develop flexible new support systems, infrastructure, and policies. On a practical, day to day level, the heterogeneous nature and scattered locations inherent in civic engagement require thoughtful preparations for transportation, scheduling, sustainability that take into account the time limitations of our own 15-week academic semesters.

Civic engagement places additional demands on students as well. When they're embedded *in* the world through the integration of curriculum and scholarship and community engagement, they realize fairly quickly that they need to change their orientations to people and to place. They are called upon to expand their capacity for empathy, and become aware of their interdependence and responsibilities. They're being asked to merge the technical and the humanistic/social. They find themselves in situations in which they must be brave enough to take risks and try new things. For our part, we're seeking and recruiting students who can respond to higher education constructed in these new ways.

Of course, placing civic engagement at the heart of higher education—in its curriculum, its commitments, and its psyche—does not mean that every single student, faculty member, or university citizen is deeply involved all the time. In fact, there are many levels of duration and intensity. Some are involved every day and others only periodically or simply indirectly as members of an engaged campus community.

---

[17] See Audrey Williams June, "Colleges Should Change Policies to Encourage Scholarship Devoted to the Public Good, Report Says," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (26 June 2008) avail online at http://chronicle.com/daily/2008/06/3568n.htm See also Nancy Cantor and Steven D. Lavine, "Taking Public Scholarship Seriously," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (9 June 2006) : B20.

Civic engagement can be structured through a range of practices: classes, centers, and initiatives that can range from one night, one symposium, or one semester to projects that can be sustained for years, even as participants come and go. At the same time, there are—and will be—students, faculty, and staff who do not feel that civic engagement would be valuable for them and do not choose to become involved. Others may be hostile.

Those in opposition can cite legitimate concerns. They worry that public scholarship will be a distraction, that it will dilute and lower academic standards, or that it will be difficult to differentiate scholarship from service. Stanley Fish advises us to "do our jobs" and "Save the World on Your Own Time."[18] Some see civic engagement as a threat to our autonomy. They warn of government and corporate encroachments on campus and raise concerns that political or profit motives will infiltrate the academic agenda.

I understand these critiques, of course, but I also believe that we must be prepared to tackle these difficult territories, to evaluate excellence in them, and to constantly interrogate the proper role for academics and the academy. We can't just pretend that world crises don't exist. This is a time more akin to Sputnik than to the quiet moments when an ivory tower might have seemed sufficient.

Concerns about the dilution of excellence and the loss of independence and impartiality were raised on my own campus during the past six years as administrators and faculty members from almost all our academic units discussed revisions in our *Faculty Handbook*. We were revising the *Handbook* so that faculty members engaged in public scholarship and civic engagement would be rewarded instead of penalized when they came up for promotion and tenure, with the same standards of excellence applied to more traditional forms of scholarship.

In this task, we were inspired by the work spearheaded by the national consortium, Imagining America, in its "tenure team initiative" lead by Julie Ellison and Tim Eatman.[19] Taking their model to heart, we initiated what turned out to be a very long conversation because such policy changes cannot be made by fiat. They require collaboration and addressing every one of the issues I've mentioned, and more.

In our case, we incorporated definitions of effective scholarship that were proposed by early opponents of the policy. When Professor of English Harvey Teres

---

[18] Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[19] See Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman, *Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University; A Resource on Promotion and Tenure in the Arts, Humanities, and Design*, available online from Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, Tenure Team Initiative on Public Scholarship at http://www.imaginingamerica.org/TTI/TTI_FINAL.pdf accessed 23 March 2010.

presented the proposed *Handbook* revision to the University Senate, it won unanimous support.[20] Now the work must really begin as we strive to fully utilize the new opportunity to evaluate excellence in publicly engaged scholarship as our rigorous traditions demand.

And even as we make progress, we remember that not everyone can, or even should be actively involved in public scholarship and civic engagement. Nonetheless, I do believe that the mere *awareness* of civic engagement can have a ripple effect that is transformative for all.

To take an example that I know well from my days as Provost at the University of Michigan, the number of people at Michigan who were deeply involved day to day in the defense of affirmative action in the Supreme Court cases *Grutter* and *Gratz* was fairly small. Yet the full engagement of the institution, in collaboration with external groups and organizations from labor, politics, professional societies, corporations, even the military, who joined the cases by filing *amicus* briefs, meant that the implications for higher education and society were not lost on anyone on campus, even if they disagreed with our stance or simply weren't interested. Engagement with these critical social issues—race, diversity, and justice—made a critical difference in the experience of higher education, no matter the intensity of one's own involvement.

Similarly, as I think about the ripple effects of Scholarship in Action on my own campus, and the many other experiments in civic engagement on other campuses, I feel better about our chances as a nation and indeed as a world facing what we do now. Getting communal social responsibility in the "drinking water" of our campuses will not be easy or uncontested. Building third spaces of collaboration that draw on all our disciplines and all the talents of our next generation will require imagination, flexibility, and courage. Yet American higher education has historically prospered when it takes such action and moves forward with innovation that can make a difference. We must confront the issues that divide our society, derail prosperity, and threaten our social and physical environments. This is not the time to withdraw to ivory towers.

[20] Harvey Teres gives an account of this process in "Revitalizing Literary Studies," a chapter in his book *The Word On the Street: Linking the Academy and the General Reader*, forthcoming from the University of Michigan Press.