

# Democracy, Civic Participation, and the University: A Comparative Study of Civic Engagement on Five Campuses

Susan A. Ostrander  
*Tufts University*

*This research is a comparative study of civic engagement on five campuses. Based on site visits, interviews on campuses and in host communities, document analysis, and literature reviews, four key findings emerged: (a) shifting and varying emphases in main components of engagement; (b) local factors that facilitate and present barriers to engagement; (c) intellectual rationales and projects to drive new knowledge, involve faculty, and institutionalize and sustain engagement; and (d) new organizational structures to link the campus and community and share power and resources. The argument is made for a dynamic and developmental framework that acknowledges multiplicity and flow. The article concludes with an initial mapping of changing relationships between local factors and civic-engagement program emphases and an articulation of three main current theories of engagement that a developmental framework would take into account.*

**Keywords:** *democracy; civic engagement; university civic engagement; service learning; community-university partnerships*

A compelling and expanding literature provides strong arguments for why and how universities today are engaging civically. Of special relevance to the nonprofit research community are the main concerns that drive this movement: grounding academic knowledge in real-world conditions, connecting knowledge to practice, bringing academics and practitioners into closer relationships, improving conditions in local communities, and building democracy and civil society. This article is based on a comparative empirical study aimed at understanding what different universities are presently doing in relation to civic engagement, why, and how.

The research resulted in four key findings:

1. The main components of engagement (student learning, curriculum transformation, community-defined priorities, and knowledge produc-

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, vol. 33, no. 1, March 2004 74-93

DOI: 10.1177/0899764003260588

© 2004 Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action

- tion) vary and change in emphasis as the work develops and as circumstances change;
2. Local community factors and conditions present both facilitators and barriers that need to be identified, understood, and taken into account;
  3. An intellectual rationale and a set of intellectual projects are important to involving faculty; and
  4. New organizational structures appear necessary to develop and sustain campus-community partnerships that share power and resources.

The main argument that emerges from these four key findings is that university civic engagement can perhaps be most fruitfully understood and practiced in a dynamic and developmental framework.<sup>1</sup> This argument contrasts with the more common search for singular models or universal best practices. At the end of this article, I consider some possibilities for a developmental framework that maps relationships between local factors and conditions and programmatic emphases of engagement efforts. I also begin to connect this main argument with the ongoing development of alternative rationales or theories about university civic engagement.

The rest of this article begins with a short review of big-picture forces both inside the academy and in the larger society that are moving universities today toward greater civic engagement. Next is the methodology used in this comparative study. The following longer section discusses the four key findings followed by a short discussion of implications.

#### FORCES MOVING HIGHER EDUCATION TOWARD CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

University civic engagement has been receiving more and more attention since the 1980s. Indeed, leaders in the field now conclude that “a movement is emerging” (Maurrasse, 2001, p. 1).<sup>2</sup> Top professional organizations in higher education have recently devoted their annual conferences to the topic,<sup>3</sup> major publications in academe have featured the issue,<sup>4</sup> and the literature (both practical and theoretical) is growing rapidly.

Although the current surge in activity seems unprecedented, neither the historic, guiding philosophies that shape universities’ active involvement in society nor the difficult on-the-ground practices necessary to bring such work to fruition are new. Both are rooted in educational and social principles developed by John Dewey (1916; see also Harkavy & Benson, 1998) and Jane Addams (1938; see also Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Wallace, 2000), forged in contemporary community service learning initiatives, and led by organizations like the National Society for Experiential Education and Campus Compact.<sup>5</sup> Indicative of the current strength of propelling forces, some observers have gone so far as to argue that today’s research universities will not survive unless they increase their connections to local communities and relate

academic research and teaching more closely to real-world issues (Lerner & Simon, 1998, p. 479; Overton & Burkhardt, 1999, p. 227).

The advancing claim is that universities must have some link to and serve some useful purpose in addressing the major issues of the day or else they become socially irrelevant and, therefore, not capable of being sustained as institutions (Boyer, 1990, 1994)—again, not a new idea, but one with special resonance in today's context where universities must increasingly justify rising costs by defending their legitimacy and contribution to society (Boyte & Kari, 1996, p. 185; Edwards & Marullo, 1999; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). University civic engagement is further advanced by the reemergence of a wider national movement for civic engagement and renewal (Eberly, 2000; Edwards, Foley, & Diani, 2001; Fullinwider, 1999; Gamson, 1997; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999) that includes a call for civic education and public scholarship (Ehrlich, 2000; Matthews, 1997).

Although critical assessments of higher education by people inside and outside the academy are also certainly not new, an especially broad constituency—political and civic leaders, media spokespersons, funders of higher education, parents, students, and the general public—now call the university to account (Thomas, 2000) to the point where it has become common to view higher education as being under attack (Todd, Ebata, & Hughes, 1998, p. 231). Some critics urge “higher eds” to emphasize practical skills and innovative knowledge that respond to the needs of the market and support economic growth and productivity locally and globally. Others look to the academy to pass on some traditional, established body of knowledge that marks an educated person. Still others want the academy to produce new scholarship that questions the dominant culture and current order (which some see as serving the interests of established elites) thereby replacing it with knowledge more conducive to economic and social justice.

One of the appeals of university civic engagement is that it seems to reach across (or over) these and other contested and contradictory views of the role of higher education in society. This broad appeal rests on the location of the current movement for university civic engagement in widely shared concerns about the state of American democracy and civil society reflected in the admittedly lofty language of a 1999 Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education signed by college and university presidents:

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 of 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. (Campus Compact, 1990, ¶ 11)

Although scholarly debates rage about whether citizen involvement in the United States has declined to crisis levels or is simply taking new and differ-

ent forms outside electoral politics (Putnam, 2000; Ridings, 2001; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999; Wuthnow, 1999), consensus has emerged about the need to increase civic participation and strengthen democracy with universities called upon to play a leading role. This role is enhanced by college faculty who more and more oppose the view that university education and scholarship should simply serve the goals of market. As one faculty member I talked with at Minnesota put it, "I don't want the university transformed into a corporation." Leading advocates of higher education civic engagement denounce "education as a commodity, students as customers, and securing public support as a challenge of public relations" (Boyte & Kari, 1996, p. 185). In this view, then, the new push toward university civic engagement is part of an effort to develop alternatives to measuring the value of a university education by students' future economic success, which some see as "narrow careerism and private self-interest" (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi).

Proponents of civic engagement argue that higher education has historically had a role in fostering democracy and citizen participation and providing social value through both its educative function and its production of knowledge. They argue that this role has been lost in recent decades (Sax, 2000). They argue further that the quality of knowledge itself is threatened by the academy's disengagement from real-world concerns and that better knowledge results from grounding and testing in real-world conditions and contexts (Harkavy & Benson, 1998).

A civic-engagement perspective calls into question research and teaching based solely on issues and questions that academics define as worthy of study and attention. It contests the conduct of research without the active involvement of people outside the academy who may be knowledgeable about the issues and are affected by the outcomes of the research. Instead, it calls for faculty and students to engage with issues and questions that people in communities off campus name as important and to collaborate in true partnership, not simply consultation, with people outside the academy (Checkoway, 1997).

College faculty appear to be experiencing a sense of isolation and loss of meaning caused in part by methods of knowledge production and dissemination that are disconnected both from the pressing issues of the day and from those outside the academy who are most actively affecting and affected by those issues. Many faculty members are also disheartened by a lack of public interest in the results of academic labors, and they are eager to do scholarly work that will receive more attention and respect. A leading faculty member at the University of Minnesota told me, for example, "We interviewed faculty, and they described a loss of public meaning in what we do. They told us we should be about more than building an academic career" (Edwards & Marullo, 1999, p. 762).

Another force toward civic engagement is a sharper understanding of how critical are the problems we face both in the United States and internationally: economic and overall human insecurity, environmental degradation, hunger, poor schooling, lack of affordable housing, inadequate health care, and so

forth. Leaders in the movement for civic engagement argue that universities, community nonprofits, local leaders, and grassroots activists, as well as government and business, must now all work together to build on our strengths and seek more lasting solutions.

More mundane but no less important forces also have their place in the move toward increased civic engagement. Most universities have expanded their geographical boundaries and now have little room to grow (Maurrasse, 2001, pp. 4-6, 20-21). Good community relations with those who hold claim to the various permits needed to build and renovate buildings and sports fields thus become more important. When the campus is a large local employer dependent on a local labor force to get its plant and programs run well and efficiently, town-gown relations also take on special value.

In sum, forces pushing today's campuses toward increased civic engagement include (a) an effort to deal with increasing criticisms of higher education and contradictory views of educational goals, (b) an apparent consensus about the importance of reinvigorated national civic participation and the university's responsibility in relation to it, (c) a renewed call for relevance of academic knowledge paired with a growing sense among college faculty of isolation from real-world questions, (d) ever more critical and pressing public concerns, and (e) more mundane matters such as space and town-gown relations (for a fuller discussion of larger societal forces driving the university civic engagement movement, see Edwards & Marullo, 1999; Marullo & Edwards, 2000).

#### METHOD OF CURRENT RESEARCH

During summer 2001, I visited five colleges and universities to learn about their civic engagement practice.<sup>6</sup> These intensive 2-day site visits to each school included interviews with administrators, faculty, and students; visits and interviews with off-campus community partners; and reviews of numerous documents.<sup>7</sup> The impetus for the project came from my own university's new initiatives and my desire to contribute to them.<sup>8</sup> To identify the main questions that would guide my research, I talked with key people on my campus about what information would move our own efforts forward. The following research questions emerged in those conversations:

- How can civic engagement efforts establish priorities?
- How can both university and community concerns be addressed?
- What are opportunities to develop new knowledge? How can faculty be engaged?
- What kind of infrastructure and resource-sharing needs to be established in relationships with community members?

Recognizing that many colleges and universities around the country could provide valuable information and address these guiding questions, I also sought my colleagues' assistance in selecting which schools to study. Agreement emerged that schools visited should be somewhat similar to my home campus with a student body that was highly capable academically and/or a faculty who valued teaching and were active scholars. Schools should also be geographically diverse, vary in size, include both private and public universities, vary in the length of time each school had been engaged civically and in what propelled and guided them, and have a national reputation for excellence. With this list of selection criteria and issues to be addressed in hand, consultation with staff at the national office of Campus Compact helped me to determine which schools to visit. That advice, along with my budget constraints and the interests of my colleagues, resulted in my sending letters to the five schools. All responded quickly in the affirmative: University of Pennsylvania's Center for Community Partnerships, Brown University's Swearer Center for Public Service, the Bates College Center for Service-Learning, Portland State University's (PSU's) Center for Academic Excellence, and the University of Minnesota's Center for Democracy and Citizenship and Office for Civic Engagement.

A few caveats are in order. Because the five schools I studied were selected in part because of their reputations for excellence, they cannot be said to be typical. Because my goal was to understand what they were doing, how, and why, I make no claim to evaluate the outcomes of their civic engagement. Given that my site visits centered on specific questions and targeted particular centers of activity at each school, I did not review the overall state of affairs at any of the schools. Although each of the four key findings that emerged from this research could be a subject for more in-depth study, the current article simply highlights and illustrates those findings and their potential for new theory about university-community engagement. Finally, although I visited and interviewed community partners, the emphasis here, given the aims of the study, is on the universities' own initiatives. Much more work needs to be done to incorporate the equally important perspective of local communities.

I now turn to the four key findings of my comparative study of university civic engagement first discussing each in turn and then relating them to my main argument and to current thinking about emerging theories of civic engagement.

#### KEY FINDING ONE: COMPONENTS OF UNIVERSITY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ARE DYNAMIC AND OCCUR IN VARIOUS AND CHANGING EMPHASES

The main components of university civic engagement are student learning, curriculum transformation, community-defined priorities, and knowledge production. A first key finding of this study is the varying and dynamic emphases of these components on different campuses driven by an ever-changing context and shifting needs and demands both inside and outside the



university. This dynamic perspective was expressed by a leading administrator at Brown University who told me, "Our virtue is to avoid prescribed orthodoxy."

Although each of the schools studied exhibited all four components, schools also emphasized particular components. This seemed to be strategic, meaning that they were actively chosen and aimed at adapting to changing conditions and the emerging stage of development at the various schools.

Brown University's Swearer Center for Public Service exemplifies a student learner-centered approach, which is consistent with the university's overall stated mission to "provide students the opportunity to become architects of their educational experience" (Brown University, 2002, ¶ 14). Brown has no core requirements for students beyond those in their concentration or major. The work of student civic engagement is guided by an educational philosophy of integrating community concerns into intellectual life. Community projects are largely student initiated and defined, and students who choose to work with the Swearer Center organize themselves around issue-defined "learning communities," which are led by staff-trained student coordinators. The center pays coordinators to supervise a group of student volunteers. The issues that guide the learning communities aim to connect concerns shared by campus and community, and each is integrated into the work of a community-partner organization: child and adolescent development and education, art and society, health and development, and language and literacy education. Faculty involvement, admittedly less developed at Brown, is thought to be led by students. As one leading administrator told me, "Our theory is that students will convince the faculty."

Students at Brown emphasized how important it was for them to be the leaders in their own learning and the community projects that enhance it. One student told me, "The strength here is that programs are student initiated. I wouldn't have the same kind of commitment to programs I did not define [myself]." Another said, "At Brown, 'service' is about a lifetime commitment. If I'm going to be [that] invested as a student, I need to own the program, which I would not feel if the community designed the programs." At the same time, the students understood the value of the staff-led learning communities, which connect service to academic issues and questions. One said, "Without the conversations with staff, my thinking would not change the way it has."

The second main component of civic engagement, curriculum transformation, is exemplified by PSU, which has fundamentally altered the core curriculum to incorporate community-based learning. Driven by low rates of student retention, faculty and administrators there turned to research about intellectual development to redefine the overall purpose of education "to assist students in making the critical transition from receptors of facts to lifelong learners" (PSU, 1993, p. 8). Rather than required courses, faculty established a "program of student learning leading to [this] express purpose [with four] goals for learning" (PSU, 1993, p. 9)—inquiry and critical thinking, communication for learning and expression, awareness of broad human experience and

its environments, and responsibility to selves, each other, and to community. The faculty develops proposals that show how course work will be directed to these goals. Most important for civic engagement, PSU established a community-based learning requirement and invited faculty to design and offer new courses to fulfill it—ideally in ways that connected to their own scholarship as well as to their teaching. The faculty at PSU has created a vigorous intellectual community around course design and offerings, which is sustained by an experienced and knowledgeable support staff from both campus and community.

The curriculum-driven approach that PSU emphasizes also contains features of a student learner-centered approach reflected in what one staff member told me she tells community partners: “[I tell them students] they can learn better if they work with you.” So, although student learning is a priority, at the same time, as one off-campus agency staff told me, “Community partners define the [student] projects.”

This third main component, community-defined priorities, is a key emphasis for civic engagement at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. At the end of 1991, as part of a series of community breakfasts hosted by Bates’s president, local leaders asked the college to facilitate study and conversations between Lewiston and nearby Auburn about how the two cities might work together more or even merge. Bates convened a set of meetings around issues defined by community leaders and in May 1999 called together a 2-day community assembly where local residents established their major issue areas. Bates’s Center for Service Learning then moved toward plans to organize its activities around those community-defined issues: educational aspirations; economic vitalization; families; community leadership development; arts, culture, and diversity; and environmental quality of life. People I talked with at Bates were proud of having set up an independent entity called LA Excels (discussed later) that links campus and community: “We are a partner. We don’t run it.” At the same time, they were frank with me about the difficulties of reaching the goals they have set for themselves, especially acquiring the necessary funding. As one leading administrator told me, “[The barrier] has been to get beyond talking and get a project on the ground.”

The fourth component of university civic engagement, knowledge creation, is a central emphasis at the University of Minnesota and the University of Pennsylvania. Harry Boyte and Ira Harkavy, respectively, have led colleagues in developing a compelling intellectual framework that both guides and emerges from civic engagement. Although PSU also understands that faculty are the sustaining force of university civic engagement and that keeping faculty involved means integrating scholarly projects with civic engagement, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Minnesota have developed the theory behind their work more than any of the other schools. Their emphasis in this regard may be due both to the relative longevity of their efforts and to the intellectual leadership of Harkavy and Boyte—both prolific scholars who, along with their colleagues both inside and outside the



university, are big-picture thinkers who aim to fully integrate civic engagement into the intellectual life of the university. They seek to expand its practice well beyond their own locales, develop generalizable ways to think about and practice engagement as a way to address pressing issues, and expand democracy in their own cities and around the world. One Penn faculty member, for example, talked with me about how critical their intellectual approach had been for his own involvement, saying that to engage faculty, you have to connect with them around their research and “bring in theory” as well as “bring faculty together around real-world problems.” (I describe Penn and the University of Minnesota’s intellectual work under Key Finding Three.)

#### KEY FINDING TWO: CRITICAL LOCAL FACTORS MAY EITHER SUPPORT AND FACILITATE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OR POSE OBSTACLES

The second key finding of this study is the importance of local factors, both on campus and in host communities, which either facilitate civic engagement or pose barriers. This finding suggests that universities will have a relatively easier or more difficult time establishing civic-engagement initiatives depending on the degree to which the following factors are present or absent:

- (a) a historic, founding commitment of the institution to public benefit;
- (b) a well-articulated university mission statement containing strategic objectives directly related to civic participation and the value of connecting theory to practice;
- (c) a compelling reason to alter core curriculum to integrate civic engagement and a willingness and a capacity to utilize established knowledge about how students learn;
- (d) an active faculty who participate in the work of the university through established structures of faculty governance, which can be used to institutionalize civic engagement; and
- (e) surrounding neighborhood conditions that propel or necessitate the university to become actively involved and provide community partners with whom to work.

One campus leader I talked with at Penn emphasized the importance of a historic founding commitment, saying, “Look to the history of why your university was founded, and make the connection.” Penn describes its own historic commitment as:

Faithful to the vision of the University’s founder, Benjamin Franklin, Penn’s faculty generate knowledge that is unconstrained by traditional disciplinary boundaries and spans the continuum from fundamental to applied. Through this new knowledge, the University enhances its teaching of both theory and practice, as well as linkages between them. (University of Pennsylvania, 2001, ¶ 2)

Although schools like Penn, Bates, and Brown show that private schools can and do develop substantial university-community initiatives, a force for civic engagement deriving both from a historic founding and a current mission statement is especially evident at public land-grant colleges (Maurrasse, 2001, pp. 12-18; Small & Bogenschneider, 1998, pp. 256-258) such as the University of Minnesota whose very reason for existence was and is for public benefit. Minnesota's mission statement includes its dedication "to the application of knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world" and to "outreach and public service" defined as the need to "extend, apply, and exchange knowledge between the University and society by applying scholarly expertise to community problems" (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2001, ¶ 4).

Land grant schools like the University of Minnesota also benefit from long-established extension programs funded by state legislatures. One faculty member told me, "Extension pays for faculty to do community research. Outreach scholarship is seen by Extension as legitimate scholarship. Tenured and tenure-track positions are funded and hired as Extension faculty." In public schools, state funding and the power behind it can also be a strong incentive for schools to move in a more public-minded direction. An administrator there told me, "Our legislature said our [state] universities are not doing what they ought to be doing, not dealing with real-world problems and issues."

Another local facilitating factor—the reason to fundamentally alter core curriculum to integrate civic engagement and a demonstrated ability to base that reform on established knowledge about how students learn—is exemplified by PSU, already discussed above.

The use of existing structures of faculty governance to formulate and carry out civic-engagement initiatives was emphasized by key people I talked with at the University of Minnesota. The importance of this factor is consistent with claims that colleges cannot effectively support the study and teaching of democracy as long as they are undemocratic in their own governance (Thomas, 2000, p. 94). As one faculty member who headed a civic-engagement initiative at Minnesota told me, "You cannot do this top-down. You must have the support of the faculty." Another leading faculty member there said, "The process [of civic engagement] needs to involve and be grounded in faculty governance structures."

Finally, deteriorating conditions in surrounding or nearby neighborhoods perceived as a threat to the quality of life (and sometimes the safety) of residents and members of the university community alike can be the pivotal forces in moving college campuses toward civic engagement. Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, and the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia illustrate this best among the schools I studied. I discussed above the local context that led Bates to emphasize community-defined priorities. The work of Penn has also been framed and propelled by declining conditions in their host community of West Philadelphia.

KEY FINDING THREE: INTELLECTUAL RATIONALES AND  
PROJECTS DRIVE NEW KNOWLEDGE, INVOLVE FACULTY,  
AND NORMALIZE AND SUSTAIN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A third key finding of my study is the importance of connecting civic engagement to knowledge creation to normalize, institutionalize, and thus sustain university civic engagement over time. Current writing by others also argues that civic engagement on college campuses “must be tied to the scholarly activities that faculty value most” (Furco, 2001, p. 70). In contrast, earlier arguments for civic engagement appealed to the academy’s social responsibility and set out to expand and elevate the last of the typical tripartite set of demands well known to academics: scholarship, teaching, and service (Checkoway, 1997). These earlier appeals also emphasized a pedagogical rationale driven by the claim that student learning is enhanced by a public service or community-based learning component (Kraft & Krug, 1994; Markus & King, 1993) and that integrating service into learning positively affects moral and social development (Boss, 1994; Giles & Eyler, 1994).

Although both of these rationales—one ethical and social, the other educational and developmental—are important, they do not pertain to perhaps the most fundamental roles of the university in society: discovery and creation of new knowledge. To define the civically engaged university solely in ethical and educational terms will, according to people with whom I spoke and materials I read, likely mean that engagement will continue to be a marginalized activity (especially at top research universities) in which only a few community-minded faculty and students will choose to be involved as service added on to their normal activities. To fully integrate, normalize, institutionalize, and thus sustain university civic engagement, it must build on a solid intellectual rationale that addresses and defines the intellectual project of university civic engagement. In some cases, this includes specifying researchable questions and conceptual problems and using the university as a change agent. This includes working out over time a theory of change particular to local interests and concerns as illustrated by a leading figure at Penn who told me, “Our aim is to change the world by transforming the university.” (I discuss alternative theories of this sort in my conclusion.)

Intellectual rationales for civic engagement at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Minnesota have emerged both from the local context and from the particular interests and expertise of the individuals involved. People at Penn’s Center for Community Partnerships are “working on the intellectual problem of how to create modern, cosmopolitan local communities . . . with the American city,” which they define as “the strategic problem of our time” (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2000, p. 26). Central to this strategic problem is developing and sustaining people’s capacity to live together in democratically engaged communities across race, class, and culture. As Harkavy (1998, drawing from Dewey) put it, “Democracy must begin at home and its home is the neighborly community” (p. 278). Harkavy went on to claim

that “creating a democratic community is in the first instance an intellectual problem” (1998, p. 278; Dewey, 1927, pp. 147, 213). This intellectual project guides the choice of the geographical sites where Penn concentrates much of its work: local public schools. Why? Because “public schools ‘belong’ to all members of the community,” so they are the best place to leverage a “decentralized, democratic community-based response to significant community problems” (Benson et al., 2000, p. 29). As one Penn staff member told me, “You can get to any issue through the schools.”

At the University of Minnesota, a top administrator told me why he thought it was sometimes hard to get faculty more engaged, saying, “I think the work has to have an intellectual value.” People at the University of Minnesota Center for Democracy and Citizenship define their intellectual project as working out the problems of democracy and public life. Their work began with conceptual questions about how to engage people in civic life, change the culture of institutions, and think and act about politics more richly. Harry Boyte and his colleagues are engaged in developing new knowledge and practice around the question of how to create public work, which is their core organizing concept encompassing people coming together in an ongoing effort to create things of lasting civic or public significance (Boyte & Kari, 1996, pp. 2, 9, 16, 23, 202).

This intellectual project guides and emerged, in part, from the work of the Jane Addams School for Democracy, which is in the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, and is the century-old Neighborhood House where people from campus and community come together to learn from each other and address shared concerns. Goals of the Jane Addams School include making visible the contributions of new immigrants to honor and strengthen cultural traditions, promoting and practicing citizenship through public work and political action to address community-defined issues, and developing ways to access higher education for community residents. The work is organized around learning circles made up of local residents (Latinos and Laotian-Hmongs) alongside University of Minnesota students and faculty. Local residents define the issues and questions that guide the topics for learning circles and the political projects that emerge from them. One city resident told me, “What’s so impressive [about the Addams school] is how [the university] has turned it over to people who live in the neighborhood.” Public action projects have included a health and wellness festival organized by Latina women and a cooperative food project created across ethnic lines by the whole neighborhood.

#### KEY FINDING FOUR: NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES BUILD CAMPUS-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO SUSTAIN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The fourth and final key finding addresses the building of partnerships between universities and surrounding communities. What is perhaps most challenging is establishing and maintaining relationships across social, cultural, and economic divides plus the inequalities of power and resources that

seem endemic to these relationships (Maurrasse, 2001). Bates College Dean James Carignan has articulated this challenge with special candor:

Lewiston-Auburn and Bates have a history of town-gown relationships that are uneven. . . . Bates College students have variously labeled the town a mill town, working class, anti-intellectual, a cultural wasteland, economically-depressed, and blighted: i.e., the pits. Conversely, the college has been perceived by townsfolk as elitist, a party place, out of touch with reality, self-indulgent, ribald: i.e., a snobbish place where spoiled brats drink too much and don't understand life in the real world. (Carignan, 1998, p. 41)

A key factor in building a campus-community partnership is the willingness and ability of the university to share power, decision making, and material resources with local communities and to actively and consistently demonstrate this in how the work is organized.<sup>9</sup> The link between campus and community at Bates is evident in two structural features that a few other schools have also adopted (McCall, Groark, Strauss, & Johnson, 1998, pp. 216-225; Todd et al., 1998, p. 240; Wiewel, Gaffikin, & Morrissey, 2000, p. 36).

The first critically important structural feature is the creation of a freestanding association joining community and university, sometimes called an intermediary external organization (Keating & Sjoquist, 2000). The second main structural feature is the presence of one or more university-paid staff who link the community into the university by serving as critical bridge persons. Ideally, this staff member should come from and presently reside in the communities with which the university is partnering. She or he should know those communities well.

The freestanding association created at Bates College is called LA Excels (*L* for Lewiston, *A* for Auburn). Community leaders created LA Excels in 1998 to institutionalize the partnership between Bates and the towns of Lewiston and Auburn. LA Excels defines itself as a "community-based strategic alliance." It exists in part to leverage funds for Bates's work with local communities and is governed by a 29-member steering committee composed of local officials and leaders from business, nonprofits, community development, education, and the local newspapers. At the time of my visit, Bates's president chaired the LA Excels program, and the LA Excels offices were on Bates's campus. Bates paid the salary of the single paid employee, the LA Excels executive director, who was the immediate past assistant to Bates's president.

What Bates had accomplished was a commitment of its institutional resources, both human and financial, to civic engagement. What people told me needed to happen next is a genuine sharing of power between Bates's administration and people in local communities. People said this could be signaled by a move of LA Excels offices from campus to community. This was expressed by some administrators I talked to on campus and exemplified in what one community partner said to me: "I would like to have a center

downtown with Bates's name on it." Others talked also about the importance of added paid staff drawn from the community and increased representation on LA Excels's governing body from grassroots community members in contrast to more elite community groups and organizations.

The key staff bridge person at Bates had the title of service learning coordinator and has the main responsibility for building and maintaining the community relationships necessary for the work of community engagement. This person lives in the community and knows the issues and other residents well and is trained in the principles and practice of community-based learning and research having recently taught a course on service learning for Lewiston public school teachers who work with Bates students in Lewiston classrooms.

The University of Pennsylvania's civic engagement work has been going on for much longer than at Bates, and so Penn is understandably further along in creating new structures for community-campus partnership. (Although I did not know it when I selected schools for study, Bates was part of a replication project run by Penn to share its experience with other schools.) Penn's multidimensional approach to civic engagement is reflected in how people there have organized the work into three main interrelated organizational components:

- a university-based office (the University of Pennsylvania Center for Community Partnerships) established in 1992;
- an independent, neighborhood-based, public-school-centered entity that predates the Center for Community Partnerships and functions as "a mediating structure for on-site delivery of academic resources" called the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC); and
- a free-standing association (also housed off campus) that combines campus and community called the West Philadelphia Partnership (WPP), originally created in 1959 and operating under this name since 1983.

During my visit, I saw how porous the boundaries were between the on-campus and off-campus parts of Penn's work. I met people from West Philadelphia on campus at Center for Community Partnerships offices and staff and students from the Center for Community Partnerships when I visited the off-campus WEPIC. People seemed to flow from one place to another. For example, I heard individuals in the various settings say they would see each other later in the day at one or the other of the different sites. (This also happened at the University of Minnesota at the off-campus Jane Addams School site and the on-campus Center for Citizenship and Democracy.)

The on-campus Center for Community Partnerships at Penn shares a central structural feature with Bates: the pivotal presence of paid center staff drawn from the community that is the focus of Penn's civic engagement. The associate director for Community Partnerships at Penn's center is from the local neighborhood. It is her job to connect university faculty and students to community activities and connect community people to faculty and students



and their projects. She is the bridge person who is required for doing university civic engagement. When I asked her how the Center for Community Partnerships determines who from the community to partner with and what projects to work on, she said, "We are from West Philadelphia, so we know who the leaders are in the community."

The presence of this kind of bridge person is also a major support to faculty who want to work with students and/or establish relationships between students and the community for classroom projects. As Penn's bridge person told me, "Faculty say to us, 'If we call the [local public] schools, it takes 3 weeks [to get anything done]. If you call, you do it in a day.' And we do."

Whereas these two structural features seem critical to creating and sustaining the community-campus relationships essential to successful civic engagement, people I talked with certainly did not believe that what scholars call "mediating structures" resolve all the issues of power and resource inequality and other town-gown tensions that are perhaps inevitable in university civic engagement. As one Penn student who had taken on a major leadership role in the off-campus community mediating organization told me,

Your status as an outsider never changes, but you can change from an outsider as liability to outsider as asset. . . . A lot of what you do is just keep quiet and listen. . . . It takes a long time for people to trust you enough to ask for help.

Still, such structures make a beginning. They will need to allow for representation of mutual interests and common concerns between campus and community and institutionalize a genuine sharing of resources and power. If they can accomplish these rather daunting goals, then they may, indeed, prove to be the most important dimension of all in sustaining university civic engagement and affecting positive impacts on immediate real-world issues and longer-run concerns about democracy and civic participation overall.

#### CONCLUSION: MOVING TOWARD A DEVELOPMENTAL AND DYNAMIC FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, DEMOCRACY, AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Key findings of this comparative study of five campuses point toward a dynamic and developmental framework for university civic engagement that acknowledges multiplicity and flow rather than one codified in models and best practices. Although further research is needed to explore how these multiple findings might frame a new developmental framework, looking at relationships between local factors and particular civic-engagement program emphases can provide a starting point. An initial mapping of this relationship suggests the beginnings of a theory to guide university civic engagement initiatives. First, in schools I studied where engagement had been going on for

some time supported by a university mission that prioritized student-centered learning, the emphasis (not surprisingly) was on educating students for active citizenship. Second, where engagement efforts were more recent and where university missions were not oriented primarily around student learning, then civic engagement seemed driven most by compelling circumstances in surrounding host communities. Here civic engagement efforts (both teaching and research), again, not surprisingly, centered around those community concerns. Third, where engagement efforts were recent and fast developing, the driving force was some compelling circumstance internal to the university (such as declining enrollments). Here, rapid institutional change was a priority including fundamental curriculum transformation and changes in faculty reward systems.

These three points of observation toward a developmental theory suggest at least two guiding principles for schools aiming to become more civically engaged:

1. Campuses should place a high priority on recognizing and understanding local factors both on campus and in surrounding communities that have the potential to drive engagement efforts and develop program emphases in relation to them; and
2. In the absence of critical external or internal driving factors, launching and sustaining civic-engagement initiatives require an especially compelling and fully articulated, intellectual, educational rationale or theory of change.

What might such a rationale consist of? Three main developing rationales—all evident in one way or another in my study of five schools—seem to guide today's university civic engagement. Although all relate in some way to issues of active citizenship and democracy, each emphasizes different targets of change, different visions of what change would look like once achieved, and different ways of getting there. Like theoretical perspectives generally, each is based on a set of underlying, various, and evolving (often as-yet unstated and untested) assumptions.

The first main intellectual rationale for civic engagement is based in theories of pedagogy, personal transformation, self-development, and individual change. This is the rationale most evident, or implied, in schools that emphasize student learning. It derives in large part from theories in the field of education. A variation is located in theories of moral development. Colby and Ehrlich (2000), for example, argued that engaged universities should stress educating students toward "personal integrity, social responsibility, and civic and political engagement and leadership" (p. xxxiii). Long-standing theories of experiential education and claims for enhanced learning when service is integrated into the academic curriculum also fall within this theory of change. Most often, this perspective sees the problem to be addressed as decline in civic participation and civic values and the solution to be increasing the

number of citizens who value engagement and who act civically. The assumed cause of the problem is that people in America, especially young people, lack the skills (both analytic and practical), values (sometimes called civic virtues), and motivations to participate effectively in civic action. If young people could be motivated and educated to act civically (perhaps becoming individual agents of change), then civic participation would presumably increase. In this view, then, the ultimate goal is an active citizenry invigorated by civic virtues and empowered with the skills of effective participation. Although none of the schools I visited seemed to have fully articulated this rationale, all contained elements of it. I suspect it is the most common nationally, although that may be changing as schools move more toward institutional and societal change.

A second perspective is rooted in theories of citizenship and democracy. It envisions a strong democracy actively constituted (Barber, 1984) by people in everyday life at work and in their neighborhoods (as opposed to being an ordained form of government established from above). This is a view of democracy long held by feminist scholars (Bookman & Morgen, 1988; Naples, 1998). The problem implied here is a weak form of democracy brought about by an absence of places in society where people can engage politically close to home. A solution is to create these spaces through community building and community organizing. These efforts may include engaging in a process of shared learning about commonly identified issues, questions, and problems. One strategy for change is local, on-the-ground projects or public achievements organized around issues identified by community members. The construction of these projects is the public work of doing democracy (Boyte & Kari, 1996).

A third perspective is rooted in theories of institutional and social change and ideas about the application of knowledge generated in partnership with local communities. The problem to be addressed is a society with serious issues in need of immediate attention—problems that a fuller democracy could more adequately address. The causes of this problem reside in what the major institutions in society value and how they are structured thereby resulting in these institutions (such as universities) contributing to a less-than-humane and democratic society. A solution lies in major changes in those institutions and their connection to the larger society so that they become agents of societal transformation. Marullo and Edwards (2000), for example, saw civically engaged pedagogy and university-community collaboration as strategies for institutional and social change leading to a more just society. Harkavy (1998) and his colleagues at Penn also seemed to illustrate this perspective. Following the thinking of Dewey, they identified the major problem of our time as the challenge of living together in “democratic neighborly communities” (Harkavy, 1998, p. 278)—that is, constructing democracy across diversities of race and culture especially in urban areas. They saw public schools as major places where people come together, and they claimed the university has the potential to transform public schools into centers of cosmopolitan democracy capable of improving conditions for all of humanity.

These emerging rationales provide theories of change operating in various university civic-engagement initiatives around the country. Each theory provides much material for new research as well as innovative practice. My five-school comparative study suggests that the most fruitful direction for theory development in each of these three currently emerging perspectives—and new ones yet to be articulated—lies in developmental and dynamic frameworks that provide alternative ways of thinking and acting under locally specified, different, and changing circumstances.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to my colleague, Richard Lerner, who, in asking me to write a guest editorial for *Applied Developmental Science*, suggested a developmental way of thinking about my project.

2. The concept of a *social movement* was also used at a November 2001 conference held in Boston sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trust and Brandeis University entitled, Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Leveraging Innovation, Building a Movement, which I attended, and at a June 2002 conference on Higher Education and the Public Good, cosponsored by the Kellogg Forum by the same name and the University of Minnesota, which I also attended. National Campus Compact leader Elizabeth Hollander (Hollander & Hartley, 2000) argued that “to reconnect higher education to its earlier and higher civic purpose a social movement is required” (p. 345).

3. One example of a recent conference is the American Association for Higher Education’s 2002 Knowledge for What? The Engaged Scholar. What are known as “Wingspread” conferences, begun in 1985 and named for their venue in Wisconsin, are also notable here, such as the December 1998 conference on Strategies for Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University.

4. For example, the July / August 2001 cover of *Academe* (Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors) asked, “Are We Good Citizens? Civic Engagement and Higher Education.” The Association of American Colleges and Universities’ summer 2001 *Diversity Digest* featured an article, “The Engaged University in a Disengaged Society.”

5. See the list of Campus Compact’s publications on its Web site, [www.campuscompact.org](http://www.campuscompact.org), including its 1998 volume, “Establishing Universities as Citizens: Towards the Scholarship of Engagement.”

6. A complete version of my original report can be found on the Web site of the Tufts University College for Citizenship and Public Service at [www.uccps.tufts.edu](http://www.uccps.tufts.edu).

7. During my five 2-day site visits, I interviewed a total of 52 people (about 10 at each site), observed three classes in session, and made nine off-campus site visits to community partner organizations.

8. For a description of civic-engagement initiatives at Tufts University, see the same Web site as above.

9. Many others have also emphasized the importance of developing a shared culture.

## References

- Addams, J. (1938). *Twenty years at Hull House*. New York: Macmillan.
- Barber, B. (1984). *Strong democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Benson, L., Harkavy, I., & Puckett, J. (2000). An implementation revolution as a strategy for fulfilling the promise of university-community partnerships: Penn-West Philadelphia as an experiment in progress. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29(1), 24-45.

- Bookman, A., & Morgen, S. (Eds.). (1988). *Women and the politics of empowerment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Boss, J. A. (1994). The effect of community service work on the moral development of college ethics students. *Journal of Moral Education*, 23(2), 183-198.
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation.
- Boyer, E. (1994). Creating the new American college. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9, A48.
- Boyte, H. C., & Kari, N. N. (1996). *Building America: The democratic promise of public work*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Brown University. (2002). *About Brown*. Retrieved August 2002 from [www.brown.org](http://www.brown.org)
- Campus Compact. (1990, July). *Campus Compact—Presidential leadership*. Retrieved March 4, 2002, from [www.compact.org/presidential/plc/declaration.html](http://www.compact.org/presidential/plc/declaration.html)
- Carignan, J. (1998). Curriculum and community connection: The Center for Service Learning at Bates College. In E. Zlotkowski (Ed.), *Successful service-learning programs: New models for excellence in higher education* (pp. 40-58). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Co.
- Checkoway, B. (1997). Reinventing the research university for public service. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 11(3), 308-332.
- Colby, A., & Ehrlich, T. (2000). Higher education and the development of civic responsibility. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. xxi-xliii). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. Denver, CO: Allan Swallow.
- Eberly, D. E. (Ed.). (2000) *The essential civic society reader: Classic essays in the American civil society debate*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Edwards, B., Foley, M. W., & Diani, M. (2001). *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil society and social capital debate in comparative perspective*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Edwards, B., & Marullo, S. (1999). Universities in troubled times—Institutional responses. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42(5), 754-765.
- Ehrlich, T. (Ed.). (2000). *Civic responsibility and higher education*. Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education/Oryx Press.
- Fullinwider, R. K. (Ed.). (1999). *Civil society, democracy, and civic renewal*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Furco, A. (2001). Advancing service-learning at research universities. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 114, 67-78.
- Gamson, Z. (1997). Higher education rebuilding civic life. *Change*, 29, 10-12.
- Giles, D. D., & Eyler, J. (1994). The impact of a college community service laboratory on students' personal, social, and cognitive outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17, 327-339.
- Harkavy, I. (1998). Organizational innovation and the creation of the new American university: The University of Pennsylvania's Center for Community Partnerships as a case study in progress. In R. M. Lerner & L. A. K. Simon (Eds.), *University-community collaborations for the twenty-first century* (pp. 275-288). New York: Garland.
- Harkavy, I., & Benson, L. (1998). De-Platonizing and democratizing education as the basis of service learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 73, 11-19.
- Harkavy, I., & Puckett, J. L. (1994). Lessons from Hull House for the contemporary urban university. *Social Service Review*, 68(3), 299-321.
- Hollander, E., & Hartley, M. (2000). Civic renewal in higher education: The state of the movement and need for a national network. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. 345-366). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Keating, L., & Sjoquist, D. L. (2000). The use of an external organization to facilitate university-community partnerships. *Cityscape: A Journal and Policy Development and Research*, 5(1), 141-158.
- Kraft, R. J., & Krug, J. (1994). *Review of research and evaluation on service learning in public and higher education. Building community: Service learning in academic disciplines*. Denver: Colorado Campus Compact.
- Lerner, R. M., & Simon, L. A. K. (Eds.). (1998). *University-community collaborations for the twenty-first century*. New York: Garland.

- Markus, G. H., & King, D. (1993). Integrating community service and classroom instruction enhances learning: Results from an experiment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(4), 410-419.
- Marullo, S., & Edwards, B. (2000). Service-learning pedagogy as universities' response to troubled times. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 746-755.
- Matthews, D. (1997). Character for what? Higher education and public life. *Educational Record*, 78, 11-17.
- Maurrasse, D. (2001). *Beyond the campus: How colleges and universities form partnerships with their communities*. New York: Routledge.
- McCall, R. B., Groark, C. J., Strauss, M. S., & Johnson, C. N. (1998). Challenges of university-community outreach to traditional research universities. In R. M. Lerner & L. A. K. Simon (Eds.), *University-community collaborations for the twenty-first century* (pp. 203-230). New York: Garland.
- Naples, N. (Ed.) (1998). *Community activism and feminist politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Overton, B. J., & Burkhardt, J. C. (1999). Drucker could be right, but . . . : New leadership models for institutional-community partnerships. *Applied Developmental Science*, 3(4), 217-227.
- Portland State University. (1993). *A Model for comprehensive reform in general education*. Portland, OR: Author.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Regents of the University of Minnesota. (2001, July 10). *University of Minnesota, marks of excellence*. Retrieved August 2002 from [www.unm.edu](http://www.unm.edu)
- Ridings, D. (2001). Citizen democracy. *National Civic Review*, 90(2), 119-124.
- Sax, L. J. (2000). Citizenship development and the American college student. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. 3-18). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Sirianni, C., & Friedland, L. (2001). *Civic innovation in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Skocpol, T., & Fiorina, M. P. (Eds.). (1999). *Civic engagement and American democracy*. New York: Brookings/Russell Sage Foundation.
- Small, S. A., & Bogenschneider, K. (1998). Toward a scholarship of relevance: Lessons from a land-grant university. In R. M. Lerner & L. A. K. Simon (Eds.), *University-community connections for the twenty-first century* (pp. 255-274). New York: Garland.
- Thomas, N. (2000). What are colleges and universities doing about the problems: An overview of the college and university as citizen. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility in higher education* (pp. 63-97). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Todd, C. M., Ebata, A. T., & Hughes, R., Jr. (1998). Making university and community collaborations work. In R. M. Lerner & L. A. K. Simon (Eds.), *University-community connections for the twenty-first century* (pp. 231-254). New York: Garland.
- University of Pennsylvania. (2001, May 1). *Agenda for excellence, almanac supplement*. Retrieved June 2002 from [www.upenn.edu/almanac](http://www.upenn.edu/almanac)
- Wallace, J. (2000). The problem of time: Enabling students to make long-term commitments to community-based learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 7, 133-142.
- Wiewel, W., Gaffikin, F., & Morrissey, M. (2000). Community-university partnerships for affordable housing. *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 5(1), 27-46.
- Wuthnow, R. (1999). *Loose connections: Joining together in America's fragmented communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*Susan A. Ostrander is a professor of sociology; author of Money for Change: Social Movement at Haymarket People's Fund (1995) and Women of the Upper Class (1984), both from Temple University Press; and coauthor with Paul G. Schervish of Giving and Getting: Philanthropy As Social Relation (1990). She has published widely on social movement/social justice philanthropy, most recently, "Moderating Contradictions of Feminist Philanthropy: Women's Community Organizations and the Boston Women's Fund, 1995-2000," appearing in Gender & Society (February 2004).*