

Our Shared Commitment:

Democracy Learning is a Top Priority for Postsecondary Education

With democracy facing profound challenges at home and abroad, higher education's civic mission—affirmed since the founding of the Republic--has become more important than ever before. Today, with the majority of Americans seeking postsecondary education, higher education can become an essential training ground for civic leadership and community engagement. Through our efforts, each new generation can prepare for its role in supporting a common and public good.

Hundreds of postsecondary institutions already have taken concerted action to renew their civic missions. Through the creation of curricula engaged with real world problems, powerful civic experiences and research, and long-term community partnerships, pace-setting institutions across all sectors of higher education now are contributing to the development of more just and inclusive societies, at home and abroad.

These efforts are a strong beginning, but much more is needed to make democracy learning expected, rather than possible, for postsecondary students. Today, higher education is dotted with pockets of great democracy learning and practice. But to fulfill higher education's civic mission, we need to make civic inquiry and democracy engagement part of each student's educational pathway.

As the 1947 Truman Commission urged after the horrors of World War II, higher education's principal purposes are to bring "to all the people of the Nation," "a fuller realization of democracy in every sphere of life" and the "application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems...."

Today our social problems encompass equity, the environment, racial healing and justice, social trust, food and housing security, economic opportunity, and a living wage for all who work. For many students, these problems are both daily realities and daunting barriers to college enrollment and persistence.

Students want to help create solutions that transform lives. We owe all students a quality education that empowers them to learn and act, alongside diverse partners, to build a better future. We owe them, as well, a strong foundation in civil discourse—the capacity and commitment to engage respectfully and productively with views and experiences different from their own.

Equally important, we must rally to build public recognition that, just as civic learning *is* a core purpose for postsecondary education, it also builds essential workforce skills. Teamwork, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and engagement across difference are the real-world skills that build both better democracies and creative economies. Investing in democracy learning expands economic opportunity as well.

It is time to make high quality, equity-committed civic learning expected and experienced across postsecondary education.

Toward that end, each of the signatories to this statement pledges to:

- Affirm the civic mission of postsecondary education and take vigorous action to help higher education fulfill that mission;
- Showcase examples in our community of civic engagement and democracy learning at scale – involving all students and especially students from communities that have been chronically underserved in U.S. society;
- Engage public and policy leaders with the importance of higher education's civic mission and the need to advance equity-committed civic learning in college;
- Support and align with educational reforms in P-12 civics and history that also are moving forward in U.S. states, communities, and schools;
- Work in our own contexts to provide high quality civic learning for students, including: connections between curricular and experiential learning; opportunities to work on significant public problems; practice in constructively engaging views different from one's own; and disaggregated evidence about what works and what needs improvement in students' experience of democracy learning;
- Provide leaders and educators the support needed to deepen civic learning and democracy engagement in their own contexts; to make equitable participation a documented achievement; and to work toward a common goal of creating a high quality, civic-oriented postsecondary education for all U.S. students.

Signatories:

Martha J. Kanter, CEO, **College Promise**; U.S. Under Secretary of Education (2009-2013)

Lynn Pasquerella, President, **Association of American Colleges and Universities**

Yolanda Watson Spiva, President, **Complete College America**

Robert E. Anderson, President, **State Higher Education Executive Officers Association**

The CEOs of more than sixty higher education and student success organizations are also signatories. See www.collegeciviclearning.org for the complete list of Partners.

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