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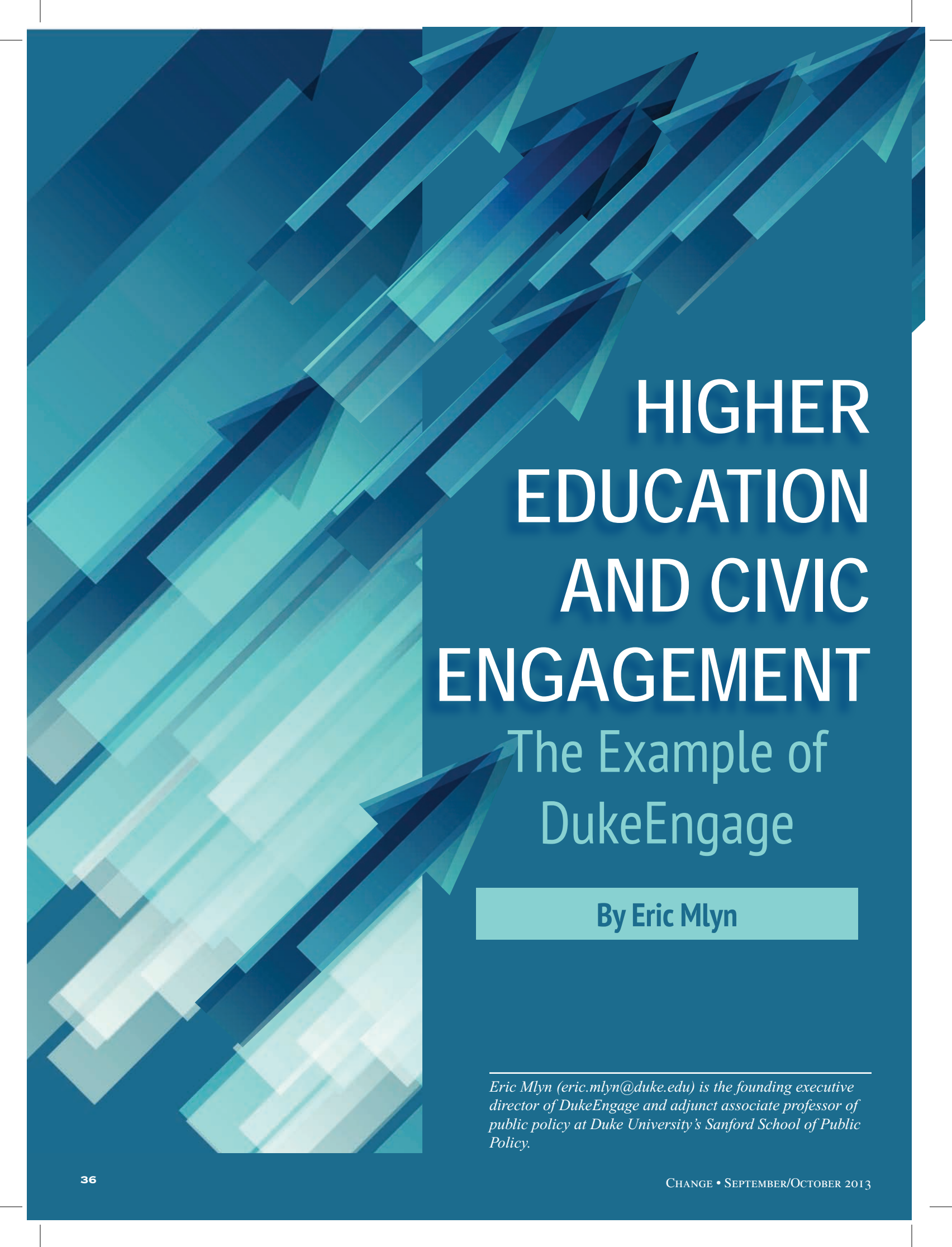
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HIGHER EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Example of DukeEngage

By Eric Mlyn

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The civic mission of American colleges and universities has received renewed attention over the last decade. From the “engaged campus” designation now offered by the Carnegie Endowment for the Advancement of Teaching to the growth of Campus Compact (from 782 institutional members in 2000 to 1150 in 2012) to major institutional investments in civic-engagement programs and centers across the nation, the historical importance of the civic mission in American higher education is ascendant.

Notable examples of the increasing attention that is being given to engagement include the Tisch College for Active Citizenship at Tufts University, the mandatory service requirement for all undergraduates at Tulane University, and the creation of DukeEngage at Duke University.

This article will contextualize the creation and implementation of the last of these programs in the broader civic-engagement movement in American higher education, describe the motivations for its development, and enumerate the successes and challenges the program has faced and the impact it has had on our students and the communities they serve. It will conclude with some reflections on the nature of the movement and the future of civic engagement, given the current challenges that American higher education confronts.

THE CONTEXT

The affordability and relevance of American colleges and universities has become an increasingly salient political issue subject to wide public debate. Given concerns about the rising cost of college, the growing debt burden that students face, the level of skills students leave college with that enable them to be productively employed, and the role that technology might play in disrupting the most common models of undergraduate education, it behooves us to make the public relevance of our work more apparent.

Although public universities have always had the civic mission as an integral part of their core identities, we are seeing more private universities take it on as well. Indeed, we would be hard pressed to find a higher education mission statement that does not mention it; more salient, many institutions are also putting significant institutional resources behind this widely shared commitment.

In addition to Campus Compact, national and international organizations have emerged to promote the civic mission of colleges and universities. The Talloires Network has 280

member colleges and universities from 69 countries that are committed to strengthening their civic mission. Imagining America has brought together 90 US member institutions to “advance knowledge and creativity through publicly engaged scholarship that draws on humanities, arts, and design.” And the Research University Civic Engagement Network (TRUCEN) convenes 40 of the nation’s leading research universities to foster civic engagement and discuss the challenges these institutions face in implementing and rewarding robust civic identities (Hartley, 2011).


EXAMPLES

Among the notable examples of major institutional investments in the civic mission, Tulane University stands out. The university responded to Hurricane Katrina by revamping its very identity. Under the leadership of President Scott Cowan, Tulane cut a significant number of staff and programs in order to align the institution with new budget realities, but it also instituted the first-ever curricular public-service graduation requirement for a Research 1 university.

Cowan has said that “public service is central to the mission of Tulane. It is part of what defines and distinguishes us as a university community. Without public service, a Tulane education would be incomplete.” To match this rhetoric, all undergraduates there are required to complete a service-learning course early in their academic careers and take on another service-learning opportunity or public-service internship during their junior or senior year. This graduation requirement, led and administered by Tulane’s Center for Public Service, has required a buy-in from all university stakeholders—including the faculty, who are largely responsible for making sure that course offerings allow students to complete this unique and ambitious requirement.

Tufts University created the University College for Citizenship and Public Service in 1999 and renamed it the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service in 2006, after Tisch gave it a \$40 million endowment gift. The Tisch College infuses civic engagement across all parts of the Tufts campus and supports students, faculty, staff, and community partners in their activities.

Courses that focus on the themes of active citizenship can be found in over 25 departments, from geology to mechanical engineering. The college hosts the Tisch Scholars Program, a four-year combination of coursework and experiential education to train students in citizenship and public



engagement. The Tisch College solidified its central role in this field when, in 2008, it became home to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), arguably the leading think tank on civic engagement and higher education, which had previously been housed at the University of Maryland, College Park (Hollister, Mead & Wilson, 2006).

The increased emphasis has also manifested itself in other high-level changes at colleges and universities across the US. Some examples include the appointment of civic-engagement leader Andy Furco to the role of vice president for civic engagement at the University of Minnesota, after he served in a similar position at the University of California at Berkeley; the proliferation of civic-engagement minors and certificates in places such as the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and major philanthropic investments in, for instance, Amherst College's Center for Community Engagement and Washington University of St. Louis's Gephardt Center.

One such investment was the one that Duke University made in the formation and creation of DukeEngage in the winter of 2007.

DUKEENGAGE

In the fall of 2006, Duke's provost convened a task force to create a program that would allow the university to pursue its recently adopted strategic mission of "using knowledge in the service of society." This "big idea" task force brought together faculty and staff who focused on civic engagement and internationalization, and they proposed the creation of DukeEngage and the Duke Center for Civic Engagement.

The program was put on firm financial footing with two endowment gifts of \$15 million from the Duke Endowment and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, for a \$30 million total. By summer 2007, a pilot with 90 students established the general shape of the program, whose mission reads,

DukeEngage empowers students to address critical human needs through immersive service, in the process transforming students, advancing the University's educational mission, and providing meaningful assistance to communities in the United States and abroad.

The program provides full funding (including airfare, room and board, and a stipend) for students undertaking immersive civic-engagement summer projects in the US and abroad. All DukeEngage projects must last a minimum of eight weeks, are not credit bearing, and are recorded on a student's transcript.

DukeEngage has funded nearly 2,400 students to undertake such projects. Nearly three-quarters of these have been abroad, and 90 percent work in one of the 39 programs that are in place for the summer of 2013. A program in New Orleans

gives students the opportunity to work on pressing public-health issues, for example, and a program in Cairo, Egypt, has students assisting at a school for street children. They may also apply for and complete, under the supervision of a faculty or staff mentor, an independent project, which can take place in the US or abroad. Approximately 40 students have opted for these projects in each of the last few years.

Most of the group programs are led by Duke faculty or staff who respond to the annual call for proposals to build new ones, although 37 of the 39 programs we ran in summer 2013 had been run before. Many lead programs in communities that they are from, others in communities that inform their research. Faculty leaders are required to be on site for a minimum of two weeks, although many spend a significant part of the summer there.

In addition to having a faculty or staff leader, all programs also have an on-site coordinator who remains with the program for the entire summer. These site coordinators are most often graduate students. Other programs are contracted out to volunteer sending organizations (VSOs) such as Social Entrepreneur Corps and the Foundation for Sustainable Development, which either build unique programs for DukeEngage or incorporate DukeEngage students into existing programs.

Before and After the Experience

From the beginning, we have stressed that although DukeEngage is not credit bearing, we did not want the program to be a barnacle on the Duke ship or a one-off event in the academic life of a student. Preparation for the experience and follow-up when it is completed are both key to students' integration of the experience.

Before the engagement project, students participate in the following:

- A required two-day DukeEngage Academy that teaches students about the joys and challenges of civic-engagement work through talks and workshops on the ethics of service, health and safety, and working with community partners. Students may also choose from 15 topical sessions that include "The Politics of Civic Engagement," "Reflection as a Pedagogy," and "Traveling as a Woman."
- A minimum of two pre-departure meetings for all group programs, which help build team cohesiveness and familiarize students with the places they are going to and the issues they will confront.
- Optional sessions throughout the spring semester on topics such as teaching English as a second language and the ethics of blogging.
- House courses that examine general or specific civic-engagement topics linked to DukeEngage programs.

Some DukeEngage Projects

The Moxie Project – New York City

Led by Ada Gregory, the director of Duke's Women's Center, this project places students in local and national organizations that focus on women and girls, including Hollaback and the National Domestic Worker's Alliance and Sanctuary for Families. Students are engaged full time in the work of their organizations—taking on special projects, delivering direct service, or responding to the immediate needs of their organizations. Every Friday, the program director or site coordinator leads discussions with students at one of the host organizations to draw out the connections between their academic studies and their practicum and to encourage reflection on the week's experiences through writing exercises. In addition to the weekly seminar sessions, students post frequently on the program website (see <http://dukeengage.duke.edu/immersion-programs/domestic-programs/new-york-city-ny> for more information).

The Dandelion School – Beijing, China

Led by associate professor of cultural anthropology Ralph Litzinger, this program places Duke students in the Dandelion Middle School for the children of Chinese migrant workers, where they undertake a wide range of tasks, from teaching English and other subjects to working with school staff in health, nutrition, life skills, counseling, and study-to-work programs. Through lectures, guest seminars, and on-site investigations, students are also introduced to a wide range of non-governmental, corporate, and university social-responsibility programs that work with migrant workers and on labor, education, and health issues. There are opportunities to meet with other volunteer groups from around Beijing; with leading Chinese and international experts in government, academic, corporate, and non-government sectors; and with Duke alumni working in Beijing. Before departure, all students enroll in a spring "house course" (1/2-credit, pass/fail courses led by students) that teaches them about issues that confront migrant workers in China (see <http://dukeengage.duke.edu/immersion-programs/international-programs/china-beijing> for more information).

Social Entrepreneur Corps – Antigua, Guatemala

DukeEngage has partnered with Social Entrepreneur Corps (SEC) in Guatemala since 2007. Students work alongside women entrepreneurs who are implementing a micro-consignment model that helps them sell goods and services made in their communities using a consignment mechanism. During the experience, DukeEngage students take intensive Spanish, live in local homes, learn about the principles of micro-consignment, and work with local entrepreneurs. DukeEngage has expanded its relationship with SEC with the establishment of a program in Nicaragua (see <http://dukeengage.duke.edu/immersion-programs/international-programs/guatemala-antigua> for more information).

Upon the students' return to campus, the president of the university greets them and urges them to think about how they might connect their DukeEngage experience to their academic and extra-curricular lives at Duke. We have helped our students to do this in a number of ways, including:


- A "Back at Duke" event where all the students gather in the fall to share their experience with posters, videos, and conversations.
- A required capstone project in the form of a reflective paper, a plan for an independent study, or a plan for continued service or advocacy and outreach.
- Reunions, so that the groups can further reflect on their civic-engagement experiences.
- Retreats where faculty directors can help students plan how to build upon their DukeEngage experiences.
- Additional optional retreats: one in the fall, in which students can examine their leadership skills and potential as they relate to civic engagement, and one in the spring, which takes students on a study tour of Washington DC to learn about careers in civic work, with meetings at places such as the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Peace Corps.

THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM

From the beginning, the goal has been for DukeEngage to be a high-impact program, combining many of the elements of what we understand to be characteristics of such program, including team-based and global learning (Kuh, 2008). To gauge the results, DukeEngage administers a post-program survey to students, program leaders, and community partners; student and program leaders are also asked to participate in pre-program surveys. Students are invited to complete a third and final survey approximately six months after the program ends.

Our goal from the beginning was that 80 percent of our participating students would experience some clear impact on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—and of these, at least a quarter would experience transformation, defined as a coherent change in viewpoint and/or making choices that they would not have made without the program. Data analysis for the 2011 student cohort suggests that we met this goal.

Ninety-eight percent of that cohort report "great" or "some" impact from their DukeEngage experience, with 82 percent of those having international experiences and 60 percent with domestic experiences reporting "great" impact. Most participants described significant personal growth or gaining a unique perspective from their experience. More specifically, they reported outcomes related to personal efficacy, leadership, goal reassessment, and cultural competence.



The value we place on community-driven service is an integral part of our program development, our training of students, and our evaluation and assessment efforts.

They also reported that they had improved the kinds of skills they will need to succeed in the 21st-century job force. Three-quarters of the students said that they were more culturally aware than they had been before their participation in DukeEngage, and 80 percent reported that the experience improved their teamwork skills and their ability to work collaboratively. All of these are skills and perspectives that employers seek in our graduates.

In addition to the self-reports, data from Duke's Office of Institutional Research also suggests that DukeEngage program participants are more likely to participate in independent and faculty research and more likely to graduate with distinction. This suggests that DukeEngage may indeed foster the kinds of faculty-student interactions that we know are the hallmark of a positive undergraduate experience and the type of educational environment that we want to provide at Duke. Clearly there is a possible selection-effect problem here, but the finding is robust, and we are working on ways to compensate for any such effect.

We regularly survey and visit our community partners to insure that our students are making important contributions to their work. The value we place on community-driven service is an integral part of our program development, our training of students, and our evaluation and assessment efforts.

In 2011 alone, DukeEngage students volunteered with more than 165 community-partner organizations in over 50 communities and 40 countries. In 2012, 87 percent of DukeEngage programs sustained their partnerships with the same communities. Ninety percent of community-partner supervisors have reported to us that they want to work with DukeEngage again, 90 percent reported that the projects that DukeEngage students volunteered on were finished, and 78 percent found that the students had had a great impact on the community through their service.

Finally, consistent with our mission, we created DukeEngage in order to make a difference in the wider Duke

University community. DukeEngage continues to shape entering classes at Duke. Our program has been the most popular answer to the "Why Duke?" application essay question since 2010, and among the 2013 early-decision applicants, more than one-quarter (28.1 percent) cited DukeEngage in the same essay. The experiential and immersive aspects of the DukeEngage program have served as models for other innovations in the Duke undergraduate experience, including the new Duke-Immerse program—a multidisciplinary addition to the curriculum that combines coursework and experiential learning.

CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE

As we have built this program, we have of course faced challenges along the way. In the beginning, much work was done with Duke's Office of Risk Management in order to insure the health and safety of our students and with Office of University Counsel to make sure we had safety procedures in place and to manage the university's exposure to risk. These efforts led to the establishment of a university-wide International Travel Oversight Committee (ITOC), which determines which parts of the world students may travel to.

DukeEngage staff members carry an emergency phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week while students are in the field. And all students, faculty, and staff are covered by International SOS, a health-care, medical-assistance, and security-services company. DukeEngage staff consults regularly with ISOS on global crises and student medical issues (Mlyn and McBride, 2013).

As DukeEngage increasingly becomes integrated into the identity of the institution, students arrive at the university with the expectation that they will be able to participate in it. But acceptances into specific programs vary widely: Some accept all applicants, some fewer than 10 percent. Overall, in any given year, demand exceeds supply by about 100 percent; thus half the students who apply are not admitted (although they may apply again as long as they are not seniors).

So we now face a student body with understandably high expectations to complete a DukeEngage project, even though we do not have enough funding to accommodate all of the qualified applicants. Given some of the issues we face, and having outlived the guidance provided to DukeEngage by the taskforce report discussed earlier in this essay, we undertook a strategic planning process that identified the core strategic goals that will guide our work the next five years (see the text box). They are connections to the curriculum, faculty engagement, community-partner engagement, expanding civic-engagement opportunities in the US, enrollment growth, and resource development.

The Future of Civic Engagement and American Higher Education

The high cost of higher education, the increasing burden of student debt, and inequitable college access are national

DukeEngage's Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Curricular Connections

DukeEngage will be a keystone in the seamless integration of the co-curricular and curricular dimensions of civic engagement at Duke University.

Action to date: The Arts and Sciences Council approved an experiential program that will enable the future creation of a civic-engagement certificate.

Goal 2: Faculty Engagement

Faculty expertise and involvement will be signature features of DukeEngage, informing all aspects of what we do, starting with the selection of new program sites through the integration of DukeEngage experiences with the undergraduate curriculum.

Action to date:

- A faculty task force, convened by the dean and vice provost for undergraduate education, is looking at faculty roles and rewards to encourage more faculty to be involved in DukeEngage.
- DukeEngage has created a faculty liaison position that will bring faculty members in as consultants to DukeEngage programs run by volunteer sending organizations (VSOs).

Goal 3: Community-Partner Engagement

Through exemplary efforts to exchange knowledge about solutions to 21st-century challenges across state, national, and international borders, DukeEngage will be known as a civic leader among peer universities because of the range and depth of its relationships with community partners.

Action to date: DukeEngage has drafted a proposal to host a conference for its community partners, so that its staff, community partners, program directors, and VSOs can explore together how DukeEngage, and civic-engagement programs in higher education more generally, can build reciprocally beneficial relationships with their community partners.

Goal 4: Expanding Civic-Engagement Opportunities in the United States

DukeEngage will be recognized for its commitment to provide Duke students with meaningful and varied opportunities to serve more communities in the United States.

Action to date: The creation of a new program in Boston for summer 2013, with projects addressing issues involving disadvantaged youth, community service, and social-innovation financing.

Goal 5: Enrollment Growth

DukeEngage will recommit itself to the goal of enrolling 600 students annually by 2017.

Action to date: Enrollment has held steady at 435.

Goal 6: Resource Development

DukeEngage will raise at least an additional \$20 million in annual and endowment support as part of a comprehensive campaign that launched publicly in September 2012.


Action to date: We are over half way to our goal.

(For more information, go to http://dukeengage.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/dukeengage-strategic-plan-2017.original.pdf)

political issues. As the buzz about online education as a solution to these problems grows, it will force elite colleges and universities to justify the high cost of face-to-face education.

When we bring the resources of our institutions to bear on pressing social and economic issues, we show that the relative wealth of our institutions is being used not just for private gain but also for the public good by addressing those issues and preparing students for their future responsibilities as citizens. The civic-engagement movement has an historical opportunity to help show higher education's unique value to the nation.

But one should not be naïve about this historical moment. Public and private institutions are facing increased budgetary pressures, resulting from both state and federal budget cuts and a rate of inflation for higher education that consistently outpaces the CPI. Both types of institutions have made significant cuts to civic-engagement efforts, often justified as necessary to maintain their "core missions."

It will be a test of the civic-engagement movement whether this time of crisis in American higher education serves to propel or curtail our work. How well we do in this crucial test will be determined in part by how well we do the work, how well we measure its impact, and how well we tell our story. 

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