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# CRITICAL CIVIC LITERACY

## *Knowledge at the Intersection of Career and Community*



Seth S. Pollack

### ABSTRACT

Traditional approaches to civic engagement have been marginalized and have had little impact on the core curriculum. *Critical civic literacy* is an alternative curricular approach to civic engagement that explicitly moves departments, disciplines, and degree programs to examine issues of social responsibility and social justice from the context of their particular field of study.

Published sixty-seven years apart, two attempts to explicate the relationship between higher education and the higher ethical and moral callings of democratic community have much in common. *General Education in a Free Society* (Bryant Conant, 1945), popularly known as the Harvard Red Book, which refers to the report's burgundy cover, and the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement's *A Crucible Moment* (2012) were generated in the wake of tumultuous global events as attempts to rally higher education around what has frequently been overlooked: its civic mission. Both acknowledge the tension—which still exists—in higher education between the goals of providing students with specialized career training and assisting in their development as members of a larger society that generates inherent responsibilities and obligations for its citizens. Each highlights the critically important role for general education in preparing students to leave college with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes not just to earn a living but to continue the work of building an ever-more inclusive and just society and global community.

Consider the following:

The heart of the problem of a general education is the continuance of the liberal and humane tradition. Neither the mere acquisition of information nor the development of special skills and talents can give the broad basis of understanding *which is essential if our civilization is to be preserved*. . . . The student . . . must be concerned, in part at least, with the words, “right” and “wrong” in both the ethical and the mathematical sense. Unless he feels the import of those general ideas and aspirations which have been a deep moving force in the lives of men, he runs the risk of partial blindness. (Bryant Conant, 1945, pp. viii–ix; emphasis added)

A socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy and a viable, just global community require informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people committed to the common good and practiced in “doing” democracy. In a divided and unequal world, education . . . can open up opportunities to develop each person’s full talents, equip graduates to contribute to economic recovery and innovation, and cultivate responsibility to a larger common good. Achieving that goal will require that civic learning and democratic engagement be not sidelined but central. *Civic learning needs to be an integral component of every level of education, from grade school through graduate school, across all fields of study*. (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, pp. 13–14; emphasis added)

The first quote was published at the end of World War II, by the Harvard Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society. Convened in 1943 at the height of this global confrontation with totalitarian regimes in both Europe and Asia, the Harvard Committee was charged to delineate what a general education was to look like if democracy and “our civilization is to be preserved.” The gravity of the postwar period can be felt throughout the document, as the Harvard Committee struggled to find an appropriate balance between higher education’s dual emphases of individual freedom and career preparation, on the one hand, and social responsibility and nation-building, on the other. The committee described the tension this way: “Taken as a whole, education seeks to do two things: help young persons fulfill the unique, particular functions in life which it is in them to fulfill, and fit them so far as it can for those common spheres which, as citizens and heirs of a joint culture, they will share with others” (Bryant Conant, 1945, p. 4). The committee goes on to point to the important role of democracy in reconciling these competing forces, stating: “It

is important to realize that the ideal of a free society involves a twofold value, the value of freedom and that of society. Democracy is a *community* of free men. We are apt sometimes to stress freedom—the power of individual choice and the right to think for oneself—without taking sufficient account of the obligation to cooperate with our fellow men; democracy must represent an adjustment between the values of freedom and social living” (Bryant Conant, 1945, p. 76).

The second quote was published after an arguably less violent and less physically traumatic event, though still a disruptive event of global significance: the Great Recession of 2008–9. Commissioned by the Department of Education and written by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, the document is entitled *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future* and has as a general heading “A National Call to Action.” The title itself communicates the deep sense of urgency for the future of both higher education and democracy that motivated the National Task Force. Similar to the 1945 document, *A Crucible Moment* emphasizes the powerful link between the state of higher education and the state of our democracy at a crucial, transformative moment in the nation’s and, in the globalized today, the world’s history. Like the Harvard Committee, the National Task Force is similarly calling on higher education to strengthen its civic mission and find an appropriate balance between the forces of education for individual gain and career training and education for civic and social responsibility. In fact, the aspirational phrase for the future society used at the beginning of the quote (“a socially cohesive and economically vibrant US democracy”) is a skillful blending of these competing goals of a vibrant economy and a cohesive democracy. While it recognizes the importance of higher education for economic revival, the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement seeks to light a fire under the civic mission, “calling on colleges and universities to adopt far more ambitious standards that can be measured over time to indicate whether institutions and their students are becoming more civic-minded” (2012, p. 14). It goes even further by identifying characteristics of what a civically engaged graduate should know and be able to do in order to “approach the world with empathy, and . . . act with others to improve the quality of life for all” (2012, p. 23). The report’s introduction concludes with this far-reaching statement, laying out these goals for the transformed higher education: “This report therefore urges every college and university to foster a **civic ethos** that governs campus life, make **civic literacy** a goal for every graduate, integrate **civic inquiry** with majors and general education, and advance **civic action** as life-long practice” (2012, p. 14; emphasis in the original).

Given the urgency and tone of *A Crucible Moment*, one would think that very little had happened in the intervening sixty-seven years with respect to

building out and firmly grounding in the academy this emphasis on the civic and social dimension of a student's learning. With the dramatic social, political, technological, and economic changes that have occurred since the end of World War II (the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the fall of the Soviet Union, the technology revolution, the emergence of the Internet and social media, and the birth of fledgling democracies around the world, just to name a few), one would expect higher education's relationship to its civic mission to be more clearly evident and democracy's future to be somewhat more safeguarded.

Or perhaps James Bryant Conant's 1945 warning about the "risk of partial blindness" might have been more prescient and predictive than even he could have ever imagined. What is the state of current efforts in civic learning and civic engagement in higher education? Might the authors of *A Crucible Moment* have gotten it wrong?

This essay looks at the impact of the dominant paradigm of knowledge production and transmission in higher education, where departments and disciplines are the gatekeepers of the curriculum and the definers of what is considered to be legitimate knowledge, on efforts to promote students' civic learning and civic engagement. It then proposes *critical civic literacy* as an alternative curricular approach to civic engagement that is strongly grounded in a university's general education program and explicitly moves departments, disciplines, and degree programs to examine questions related to power, inequality, justice, and social responsibility in the context of their specific field of study. As such, critical civic literacy integrates the personal with the professional, the individual with the social, and the career with the community, creating curricular space for degree programs to examine the issues of power, social justice, and systemic inequality that continue to threaten economic revitalization and undermine the creation of an ever-more inclusive, just, and cohesive democracy.

## Today's Civic Engagement Movement: Marginal and Adrift

As captured in the two quotes above, the expectation for higher education to educate socially responsible and engaged democrats and citizens is quite high. And in today's globalized world, with its trends toward increasing inequality, regional tensions, wars, and cultural clashes, not to mention climate change, the stakes are also high. The world's interconnectedness and global patterns of labor flow have created a complex new set of realities for nations and regions to address in building more inclusive and democratic societies. Cultural homogeneity, and the comfort it has afforded those of the "in-group," is increasingly a thing of the past, as our communities are ever-more multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic. The process of building our new multicultural communities

is made more difficult by the rising economic inequality that fans the flames of cultural and ethnic resentment, privileging the few while marginalizing the many. The stakes are high, and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to “do democracy” in this globalized and highly stratified and unequal context place new demands on our educational institutions. Has higher education responded, or has it largely ignored these trends?

Higher education has responded, but perhaps, in the margins. The past four decades have seen a steady increase in civic engagement efforts on college campuses, not only in the United States but internationally as well. For example, Campus Compact (2012b), founded in 1985 by a handful of university presidents committed to expanding the civic mission of higher education, has grown into a national organization that has almost twelve hundred member institutions and three dozen state associations. In 2000, it published the “Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education,” declaring: “As presidents of colleges and universities, both private and public, large and small, two-year and four-year, we challenge higher education to re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal. We also challenge higher education to become engaged, through actions and teaching with its communities. We have a fundamental task to renew our role as agents of our democracy” (Ehrlich & Hollander, 2000, p. 1). The growth of the movement has been supported financially and programmatically by the passage by President George H. W. Bush of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-610, 101st Cong., S. 1430), later adopted by President Clinton as the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-82, 103rd Cong., H.R. 2010), which created a funding stream to support universities in developing service learning programs as a concrete manifestation of their civic mission. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, service learning came to be seen as the most tangible and widespread expression of higher education’s civic mission. According to the most recent Campus Compact annual survey (2012a), 96 percent of member campuses reported having a campus center to support service learning and civic engagement efforts on campus.

Civic engagement gained further institutional strength and legitimacy in 2006 with the establishment of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s “Elective Classification for Community Engagement.” This new classification established a set of criteria and a review process for a university to be formally recognized as a “community engaged institution.” Over the next six years, 196 institutions formally received the Community Engagement certification, with a new, more robust round of certification beginning in 2013 (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012).

Most recently, the service learning and civic engagement movements have also expanded globally. In 2005, twenty-nine universities from around the world signed the “Talloires Declaration on the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education.” Today, more than 250 institutions in sixty-two countries have signed onto the Talloires Network, confirming their institution’s commitment to helping students develop “a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to the social good, which, we believe, is central to the success of a democratic and just society” (2005). Questions related to the role of higher education in democratic nation-building and fostering social cohesion are especially relevant in Europe, in light of the significant changes brought about by, first, the fall of the Soviet Union and, second, the economic integration that accompanied the adoption of the euro. In 2011, the Council of Europe convened a meeting of higher education leaders from Europe and the United States to examine the link between higher education and the strengthening of democratic processes in both the United States and Europe. As described by the conference organizers, “The conference is part of the cooperation between different partners committed to promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law as well as social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, and their belief in the key role of education in furthering these goals” (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 1).

So, while the past three decades have witnessed a tremendous increase in organizational capacity to support civic engagement by students, along with a plethora of policy statements by higher education leaders supporting civic engagement both nationally and around the world, recent reviews of the status of the field have found civic engagement to have made little progress at penetrating the core teaching, learning, and research processes in higher education. The general feeling is that the civic engagement movement itself is marginal and adrift (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). In a comment that I find particularly insightful and which sheds light on the severity of the struggle for legitimacy that takes place within higher education itself, John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley come to the striking conclusion that while civic engagement’s goal has been to transform higher education by reviving its civic mission, it is engagement itself that has been transformed: “Of equal concern is that what has emerged is a rather conventional, even timid, civic engagement. . . . Rather than openly questioning the prevailing norms, customs and structures of the academy, civic engagement efforts have instead adapted in order to ensure their acceptance and legitimacy within it. All too often, service learning courses are indistinguishable from internships or clinical placements: their chief aim is disciplinary learning or improved clinical practice. Democratic outcomes—encouraging students to understand and question the social and political factors

that cause social problems and to challenge and change them—at best remain hoped-for by-products” (2011, p. 290).

How could these well-intentioned, potentially transformational efforts to connect universities to the critical issues of the day have resulted in so very little—or, rather, so much more of the same? After nearly three decades of work, why is there still such a sense of urgency in the appeal for higher education to embrace civic engagement in order to safeguard “democracy’s future”? Looking more closely at the struggle that service learning has experienced in its attempt to emerge as a coherent sphere of endeavor in higher education can provide some insight. It shows how the forces of the dominant paradigm work to keep civic learning marginalized, preserving the disciplines’ and departments’ control over the core curriculum and over the key questions that students are to examine en route to earning a college degree.

## Service Learning’s Transformation from Antipoverty Program to Pedagogical Tool

For the past four decades, service learning has been the most visible and widespread manifestation of higher education’s civic mission. However, service learning’s emergence and ultimate adoption by higher education make for a somewhat twisted tale of co-optation and marginalization (Pollack, 1997). When service learning first appeared in higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, it was part of the efforts of the War on Poverty to connect university students to community-based antipoverty programs. The federal legislation behind these efforts defined service learning as a “program” whose goal was “to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate poverty and poverty-related human, social and environmental problems” (Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, P.L. 93-113, 93rd Cong., sec. 111). However, over time, and with a resurgence of the emphasis on academic rigor spurred on by the publication of documents such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), service learning evolved away from its antipoverty focus and was transformed into an educational “method.” In fact, the 1990 legislation that fueled the growth of the current service learning movement created a new formal definition for service learning: “The term ‘service-learning’ means a method . . . under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences . . . integrated into the students’ academic curriculum” (National and Community Service Act; emphasis added). By defining service learning’s role as an educational method, the focus shifted from “eliminat[ing] poverty and poverty-related human, social and environmental problems” (Domestic Volunteer Service Act) to efforts that are “integrated



into the students' academic curriculum" and which "enhance what is taught in school" (National and Community Service Act). While it first appeared as a complex programmatic approach to having universities engage with real-world issues of social inequality, service learning had become defined in policy and in practice as a pedagogical tool.

Service learning's spread in higher education has largely been a result of individual faculty members' embrace of service learning as an effective strategy to teach the traditional knowledge of their discipline, and not as a way for faculty or departments to examine issues such as service and social justice, equity and diversity, identity and belonging, or the public and the private. Furthermore, due to the contested nature of the issues underlying social and economic inequality and their connection to deeply held moral values, institutions are reluctant to engage in an in-depth examination of poverty and inequality, as it is potentially fraught with competing moral and political perspectives and commitments. Civic engagement gets strong support from institutions when its goals are vaguely stated in broad principles, such as becoming "socially responsible universities and colleges." But resistance emerges when questions of epistemology and power relations arise or when the examination of these issues begins to make claims about what should be taught in the curriculum. Taken together, the impact of these forces has resulted in a twisted, appropriated institutionalization process, which I call "pedagogification." I define *pedagogification* as the cultural reworking of an epistemologically transformative educational practice into a teaching method, stripping the initiative of its transformative content while emphasizing its utility as a tool for mastering the traditional knowledge base.

As a result of the process of pedagogification, service learning has been widely embraced for its powerful impact as an engaged, experiential approach to learning. While there has been some room on the margins for examining the students' civic learning, the emphasis in service learning has been on using the service experience to apply and master the traditional knowledge of the discipline: to help students become better readers, writers, and arithmeticians through active service in the community. The dominant paradigm in higher education has embraced service learning as an educational method while having marginalized its potentially transformative epistemological contributions to both student learning and the strengthening of our democratic institutions and processes. So while the practice of service learning is now widely diffused, it has had only a minimal impact on the core knowledge base of higher education and the knowledge-generation process. This is why we rarely see service learning and civic engagement as core requirements, embedded in majors and degree programs. Organizationally, service learning and civic engagement

offices are found most often with student affairs, as opposed to academic affairs, linked to centers of teaching and learning, or offices of outreach and extension, and not linked to majors or degree-granting programs (Center for Engaged Democracy, 2012).

## **An Alternative Paradigm: Critical Civic Literacy as Core to General Education**

For the past two decades in my role as a professor of service learning and the director of the Service Learning Institute at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), I have been doing battle with the forces of pedagogification and other aspects of the dominant paradigm of knowledge generation and transmission in higher education, as CSUMB has sought to create a legitimate curricular space to address issues of service, diversity, justice, and social responsibility. Rather than adopting service learning as a pedagogy to facilitate discipline-based knowledge acquisition, CSUMB has embraced service learning as a way to transform the knowledge base itself, integrating what we have come to call *critical civic literacy* into the core of our outcomes-based general education program. We understand critical civic literacy as an alternative approach to the traditional civics curriculum that emphasizes the role that social power plays in facilitating or inhibiting meaningful participation by individuals and/or groups in public processes. Through critical civic literacy, students examine issues of power, privilege, oppression, and systemic inequity in service learning courses that are a required part of the general education curriculum and integrated into the core requirements of the degree programs.

CSUMB has been recognized nationally for its commitment to civic engagement and is one of just a handful of public universities to have integrated service learning as a graduation requirement for all undergraduate programs.<sup>1</sup> All students at CSUMB complete two service learning courses as part of their general education program. First, students take a lower-division course that introduces them to the concepts of service, diversity, identity, social justice, and community building. Then, they take a second course, an upper-division general education course that is integrated into their major, in which they revisit these themes of critical civic literacy, but this time from the perspective of their specific field of study. As CSUMB has developed an outcomes-based educational framework, all service learning courses teach to a common set of service learning outcomes, addressing the following four concepts: (1) self- and social awareness, (2) service and social responsibility, (3) community and social justice, and (4) multicultural community building/civic engagement. The overarching goal of the outcomes is to help students to become *multicultural community-builders*: “students who

have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to work effectively in a diverse society to create more just and equitable workplaces, communities and social institutions” (CSUMB, 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Implementing such a broad, social justice-oriented vision for the integration of civic engagement throughout the curriculum has required CSUMB to reinterpret the conventional understanding of service learning. In essence, this has meant moving beyond an understanding of service learning as pedagogy and creating a legitimate space in the curriculum to discuss such contested issues as social justice, social group identity, social power, privilege and oppression, and social inequity. The fact that the upper-division service learning course is taught by the majors and integrated into their core graduation requirements means that all fields, disciplines, and degree programs at CSUMB take responsibility for examining issues of systemic inequality and social justice as a core element of their degree program. CSUMB’s goal is not just to educate technically competent professionals but to educate technically competent, socially responsible, and civically engaged professionals. This has required a transformation of the concept of the “core curriculum” and the breaking down of the long-established divide between the core knowledge of the degree program and the traditionally marginalized, general education curriculum.

## **Implications of Critical Civic Literacy as Core to the Knowledge of the Degree Programs**

Clearly, civic engagement in higher education must move beyond vague, broad, and general statements about the “public good” in the mission statements of institutions. It must move beyond a shift in pedagogy that has students “engaged” in the real world of social problems through service in order to master the traditional knowledge base of their discipline. If civic engagement is going to effectively prepare students to become the kind of multicultural community-builders that the realities of the twenty-first-century demand, then it must embrace the highly contested world of social and economic inequality and social justice as a legitimate focus of study and inquiry. As expressed in CSUMB’s development of the concept of critical civic literacy, the deep work of civic engagement is about content and knowledge. It is about the transformation of the expected knowledge, skills, and attitudes of graduates. Critical civic literacy recognizes that our new globalized, technologized, and highly unequal world requires community members to possess a new set of civic skills so that they are sensitive to diversity, aware of the role of power relations, and skilled in intercultural communication. Critical civic literacy explicitly places this knowledge and these skills and attitudes at the core of the higher education curriculum and in the

core of the knowledge base of the academic programs themselves. What are the implications for higher education, and more specifically for general education, of embracing critical civic literacy as an approach to civic engagement?

First, we need to acknowledge that civic engagement requires more than just facilitating students “doing democracy” and civic work. It is about facilitating civic learning. As a learning-based project, it needs to be organized and deeply connected to the academic side of the institution, and it needs to be led by individuals who are seen as legitimate educators and scholars by their colleagues across campus. Unfortunately, most offices of civic engagement are not academic units, do not offer courses, and are not led by faculty. As a result, they have only marginal input into their university’s core knowledge-generation processes.

A second implication relates to the ownership of knowledge and the control of the curriculum. Embracing critical civic literacy requires that departments and degree programs be open to integrating externally generated learning outcomes (concepts that might have been traditionally addressed somewhere else on campus through a “general education elective”) into the core of their curriculum. Despite the growing discussion in higher education around the importance of interdisciplinarity, departments have traditionally been resistant to yielding authority for the content of their curriculum to anyone outside their discipline or professional field. Rather than seeing “specialized degree training” and “general education” as separate, critical civic literacy breaks down the boundaries between departments and between preparation for a professional career and preparation for civic life. Embracing critical civic literacy means that issues of social justice and social inequality are not only to be discussed in sociology and political philosophy departments: rather, these concepts are common to the discourse in every department and degree program across campus.

A third but related implication is that departments get the opportunity to examine issues of social justice, democracy, and systemic inequality that are relevant to their specific field of endeavor. While these issues, in their purely conceptual or theoretical form, might be more germane to the humanities or social sciences, the social reality of injustice and inequality affects all of us as individuals and as community members. Critical civic literacy blurs the separation between an individual’s professional life and an individual’s personal and civic life, and as a result, the core content of the major examines the intersection between the technical or theoretical area of specialization and the reality of social inequity that exists in our communities.

With critical civic literacy, the service learning curriculum-development process begins at this point by asking faculty to identify social justice issues that are pertinent to their field of study. These issues are then framed as the guiding

“social justice metaquestion,” which informs the entire curriculum-development process, including the identification of specific service learning outcomes for the course. This approach turns the traditional service learning curriculum-development process on its head. In the dominant paradigm, the curriculum-development process starts with the question, “What can my students *do* in the community that allows them to use the knowledge they’ve acquired in the course?” The focus is identifying a relevant service activity or project that relates to the course. From a critical civic literacy perspective, curriculum development starts with identifying a social justice metaquestion: “What is the overarching question about inequality and social injustice that I want my students to critically examine through this service learning course?” It is the social justice metaquestion that then guides the development of learning outcomes and the identification of relevant community service opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

For example, in the traditional paradigm, a service learning course in computer science or information technology might focus on students bringing a variety of new computer-related solutions to community organizations, applying the knowledge they have learned in their major to address real community needs around technology. The students might be doing service using technology; but are they learning about service and social responsibility or inequality and injustice? From a critical civic literacy perspective, curriculum development begins with the identification of a key social justice issue related to technology, such as the “digital divide.” The digital divide then becomes the organizing theme for the course, and student learning focuses on questions such as, *How has digital technology accentuated or alleviated historic inequalities in our community? And what is my responsibility for addressing the “digital divide” as a future IT professional?* In addition, the issues related to the underlying root causes of the digital divide become part of the discourse among the faculty, students, and their partners in the community. As a result, the department is doing more than just having students practice their technology skills in the community. It is also actively looking at the social implications of our technological advances, with a concern for using technology to reduce inequality and marginalization. The knowledge base in computer science has itself been transformed, as it now explicitly examines power, community, and inequality as a core component of the curriculum.

A fourth implication arises from the recognition that facilitating student learning about issues of diversity, identity, social justice, and systemic inequality is extremely challenging. Topics such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression are very personal, and classroom discussion of these issues often becomes highly charged. While our faculties are full of highly trained experts in a wide variety of fields, very few of us have been trained

as experts in facilitating learning about social justice and systemic inequality. And yet, that is essentially what we are asking faculty to do. Embracing critical civic literacy means that our departments across campus must possess the necessary skill sets to teach this challenging curriculum. Making critical civic literacy core to our curriculum requires that we develop a different set of pedagogical skills (facilitating experiential learning and community-based learning), as well as competency in a new knowledge base (teaching about inequality and social justice). How do we develop these capacities in our diverse academic programs? One option is to intentionally hire faculty with these skill sets and begin to populate our departments with faculty whose scholarship and expertise bridge the technical and social realms. Another approach is to build these new capacities with our existing faculty members through professional development efforts. This requires that the support units on campuses have the expertise, and the legitimacy, to partner with faculty on this challenging journey to develop the skills needed to facilitate student learning about social justice, social group identities, and systemic inequality.

## Conclusion

The past four decades have seen the emergence of a relatively robust set of policies and programs supporting the integration of service learning and civic engagement efforts in higher education institutions the world over. Yet, while these efforts have resulted in some shifts through the embrace of service learning as a pedagogical tool, the more fundamental, epistemological issues that are central to critical civic literacy have remained largely unaffected. The process of pedagogification has co-opted the transformational potential of these efforts, rendering them effective for knowledge transmission in the dominant paradigm, as opposed to transforming the knowledge base itself. While service learning initiatives have multiplied, all indications show that we are still far from producing more civically minded and democratically engaged graduates and community-builders.

*Critical civic literacy* allows us to rethink the relationship between the specialized knowledge of the disciplines and departments and what we have come to know as general education. It breaks down the artificial barrier between what takes place in the workplace and what takes place in neighborhoods and communities. In fact, it makes this relationship between the knowledge and skills required in the workplace and the social inequality that exists in our communities a pointed focus of study and authentic engagement.

Critical civic literacy takes civic learning seriously, as the civic world becomes as important a focus for study and engagement as is the world of the

profession and career. It forces us to ask and answer hard questions about the core curriculum. What are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that graduates need to acquire in order to participate effectively in an unequal, highly stratified, and globally influenced democracy? How does one build bridges across deeply engrained historical, cultural, and economic differences and participate in building a more equitable and sustainable global economy? If we want to “foster a **civic ethos** that governs campus life, make **civic literacy** a goal” (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 14; emphasis in the original), and provide students with the “broad basis of understanding which is essential if our civilization is to be preserved” (Bryant Conant, 1945, p. viii), then these questions must be part of our discussions in general education programs, department meetings, and classrooms all across campus.

## NOTES

1. CSUMB is the only two-time recipient of the prestigious President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, awarded annually since 2006 by the Corporation for National and Community Service (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/honor-roll>).
2. The complete service learning outcomes are available online at <http://catalog.csumb.edu/undergrad-education/general-education/d4-upper-division-service-learning>.
3. CSUMB has developed a rich approach to curriculum development using a critical civic literacy framework. For a more detailed description of the faculty development program and access to the curriculum development workbooks, visit <http://service.csumb.edu/curriculum-development>.

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