Educating Undergraduates for Responsible Citizenship

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A STORY WITH A MORAL

Ico Almeida arrived at Duke University in 1995 from Wisconsin, a first-generation American from a Cuban immigrant family. He was high-achieving—a past president of his high school class—but, like most undergraduates on most campuses, he had no particular interest in issues of social justice or politics when he began college. As a sophomore, however, he began participating in Duke’s year-long Service Opportunities in Leadership (SOL) program, which enrolls about 20 to 30 students each year. SOL students first take a course that prepares them to explore issues such as the way conflicting values in local communities can affect civic participation. Then the students work in summer internships in community-based organizations, followed by a course that integrates what they learned in their internships with research on social policy issues.

Although he had no prior interest or experience working on labor issues, Almeida’s experience in the SOL entry course led him to choose a summer internship working with the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) in New York City. His job was to teach Latino garment workers about their rights and instruct them on basic organizing skills. He also helped workers prepare complaints to the U.S. Department of Labor about back wages owed, forced overtime, and sub-minimum pay. He even did undercover work for the department by pretending to be an immigrant and working in a substandard garment factory.
Almeida’s emerging interest in the conditions of low-wage workers led him to collaborate that summer with students from other colleges to plan the Sweatshop-Free Campus Campaign. The group studied international labor standards and monitoring mechanisms as they drafted a code of conduct for college campuses, like Duke, that license apparel manufacturers.

Following his summer internship, Almeida began the third phase of the SOL program, a one-semester course taught by Alma Blount, the program’s director. The course builds on the students’ summer field experiences, connecting them with deeper substantive knowledge and careful thought about the systemic dimensions of the social problems they confronted in their internships. In the process, Blount attempts to foster a long-term commitment to public service.

As he was taking this course, Almeida helped organize Students Against Sweatshops at Duke, which sought meetings with the university administration of President Nan Keohane to discuss the group’s concerns. Although the administration initially did not agree with the group’s recommendations, over time Duke administrators came to recognize the moral legitimacy, as well as the educational value, of the issue and invited students to participate in drafting a new code of conduct for Duke licensees.

In 1999, Almeida and other students convinced Duke to become the first university in the nation to amend its multi-million-dollar licensing contracts to require companies like Nike to publicly disclose the specific locations of their garment factories, which human rights advocates agree is essential for independent monitoring of labor conditions. Over the next few years, more than 100 universities followed Duke’s lead.

As a result of all these experiences, Almeida gained the understanding, skills, and commitment needed to become a competent and responsible civic leader. After college he continued to pursue his passion for workers’ rights, doing student outreach around sweatshop issues for the AFL-CIO and then using a Fulbright Fellowship to study international trade and labor rights in South America. He is now in his last year of law school to continue his human rights activism. His most recent summer job was in the national office of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund working on voting rights and equal educational opportunities.

Almeida is not an isolated example, although his story is a particularly compelling one. Under President Keohane, Duke has committed to the moral and civic education of its undergraduates and recently revised its entire general education program in ways that support those goals. The revised curriculum requires students to take two courses that help them develop skills of ethical inquiry and also incorporates ethical themes into its required first-year writing program.

The moral of the Almeida story is that when institutions like Duke create programs of moral and civic education for their undergraduates they can make a profound difference in students’ lives and in their capacity to contribute productively to the world. Duke is among the relatively few colleges and universities that purposefully build moral and civic learning into the heart of undergraduate education.

Most institutions include some service-learning and ethics courses, and virtually all offer extracurricular service opportunities. But these courses and programs reach only a self-selected few, and too many students go through their entire undergraduate experience without encountering courses or extracurricular activities that speak directly to their moral and civic development.

In the research that led to our book, Educating Citizens, we collected information about moral and civic education programs at dozens of campuses and visited 12 that make a conscious effort to reach all of their students, using multiple approaches to address all dimensions of moral and civic development (see box on page 48). We spent several days at each of the 12 campuses, interviewing administrators, faculty, and students, conducting focus groups, sitting in on classes, and observing a wide range of programs.

The “case study” institutions are not, of course, the only ones doing notable work in this arena. We chose these institutions in part because they represent a wide range of institutions, including community colleges, four-year colleges, comprehensive universities, and universities with graduate and professional programs. They included, also, residential and non-residential, public and private, highly selective and non-selective, and large and small institutions.

**Moral and Civic Values Are Inseparable**

We believe that moral and civic values are inseparable. We understand the term “morality” to be concerned with prescriptive judgments about how one ought to act in relation to other people, in personal relationships, in one’s work, and in the public realm. Morality is important in public as well as personal domains, and many core American democratic principles—including tolerance and respect, impartiality, and concern for both the rights of the individual and the welfare of the group—are grounded in moral principles.

The problems that confront civically engaged citizens always involve strong moral themes. These include fair access to
resources such as housing, the obligation to consider future generations in making environmental policy, and the conflicting claims of multiple stakeholders in community decision-making.

None of these issues can be adequately resolved without a consideration of moral questions and values. A person can become civically and politically active without good judgment and a strong moral compass, but it is hardly wise to promote that kind of involvement. Because civic responsibility is inescapably threaded with moral values, we believe that higher education should aspire to foster both moral and civic maturity and should confront educationally the many links between them.

**Dimensions of Moral and Civic Maturity**

What are the immediate educational goals of preparation for responsible citizenship, honorable work, personal integrity, and sense of purpose? Moral and civic maturity is not a unitary phenomenon. It is made up of multiple dimensions: moral and civic understanding; moral and civic motivation; and the core skills of moral and civic responsibility that are essential for applying core knowledge and commitment, transforming informed judgments into action.

Various domains of moral and civic understanding are important to students’ full development. Central among these are the development of sophisticated moral judgment and the understanding of key civic and political concepts. Many college students also are grappling with issues of epistemology—“What is true?” and “How can you know?”—as well as with questions of ethical relativism. Sorting out these questions and reaching some personal resolution is one of many developmental tasks that can be appropriately and fruitfully addressed by higher education. Students also need to master and learn to apply knowledge in areas critical to responsible citizenship.

Of course, to be morally and civically engaged and responsible, students not only must achieve a deeper understanding of the issues, they also must be motivated to do something about them. This means their values must reflect social and moral concerns, and these concerns must be central to their sense of who they are. If they are to be engaged citizens, they also must gain a sense of political efficacy, that is, a sense that what they think and do critically and politically matters. But they also need long-term faith and hope to get them through the inevitable tides when their well-intended actions do not seem to move them toward their goals.

Finally, college graduates should be competent in their civic and political participation. They need to develop an understanding of the particular mechanisms that are likely to be effective in tackling different kinds of issues, and they must gain the practical capacities and skills they need to succeed. These skills include moral and political discourse and other forms of communication, interpersonal capacities, and many specific skills of civic and political engagement—for example, how to negotiate differences of opinion and move a group forward under conditions of mutual respect.

**Core Values of Moral and Civic Education**

Despite their diversity, the institutions we studied in depth share some common values. Some of these are entailed in the academic enterprise itself—intellectual integrity, concern for truth, and academic freedom, for example. By their very nature, it is important for colleges to foster values such as mutual respect, open-mindedness, a willingness to listen to and take seriously the ideas of others, and public discussion of contested issues. The academic enterprise would be seriously compromised if these ideals ceased to guide scholarship, teaching, and learning, however imperfect the guidance may be in practice.

Another important source of a common core of values derives from educational institutions’ obligation to educate students for responsible democratic citizenship. These values include concern for both the rights and the welfare of individuals and the community, recognition that each individual is part of the larger social fabric, critical self-reflection, and commitments to civil and rational discourse and procedural fairness.

Campuses use many different means to foster these values. One approach is to establish learning outcomes that students must meet in order to graduate. Several of the institutions we visited use some kind of outcomes-based approach. California State University–Monterey Bay, for example, has established a number of “university learning requirements,” which all students must satisfy. Along with language, history, math, and science requirements, university-wide requirements include study of ethics and democratic participation. Students can choose from among many courses that satisfy these requirements.

One course that satisfies both the democratic participation requirement and the state’s California history requirement, for example, is Social and Environmental History of California, taught by Gerald Shenk and David Takacs. This multidisciplinary course looks at the way the geography of California has shaped the evolution of the state’s diverse cultures and how the choices people made have shaped the physical landscape. Takacs and Shenk hope students will learn not only history, but also how to use historical analysis and knowledge to illuminate contem...
porary issues and to clarify what they believe in and are prepared to act on. They use an array of strategies to accomplish this, including journal writing, research on historical issues, and "historically informed political projects," as well as readings, lectures, and discussions.

Although all of the colleges and universities we studied share a commitment to fundamental academic and democratic values, some—such as religiously affiliated institutions or institutions that serve particular populations—also stand for more specific values that reflect their missions, histories, and student bodies. This means that the content, shape, and meaning of moral and civic maturity take on a somewhat different quality at individual institutions.

Spelman College, for example, builds on its heritage of educating women who are leaders in the African-American community through approaches that include a year-long freshman orientation program and many activities coordinated through the Johnetta Cole Center for Community Service and Community Building. In addition, all first-year students must take The African Diaspora and the World, a two-semester, writing-intensive course that explores the relationship of the African Diaspora to other cultures and to major historical, philosophical, artistic, and scientific developments.

Even for institutions with special missions, however, a key to legitimacy for moral and civic education is that it must not indoctrinate. Programs of moral and civic education anywhere must be very careful not to "restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society," in the words of political scientist Amy Gutmann.

Although their approaches to moral and civic learning are different, each of the institutions we studied shares a central concern for developing student capabilities for open inquiry and genuine debate, particularly clarity of thought, openness to reasoned arguments, effective communication skills, and tolerance of different perspectives.

With the exception of honor codes, the central pedagogies and other programs intended to foster moral and civic responsibility in these institutions are self-consciously non-coercive. In the discussions we observed, students did not hesitate to disagree if they thought a faculty member or another student was trying to impose his or her view on them.

**INSTITUTIONAL SITES OF MORAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION**

There are three main sites of moral and civic education, and all are important: the curriculum; extracurricular activities; and the campus culture.

**The Curriculum.** Among the undergraduates at every college and university are some who look for ways to contribute to something larger than themselves, who are inspired by moral ideals or passionate about social or political issues. They are primed to take advantage of the many ways a college education can deepen those convictions and bring them to a higher level of intellectual and practical sophistication and competence. Even so, not all of these students find their way to the right developmental experiences; for some the inspiration will fade during college, giving way to narrower, more self-interested concerns so that their earlier passion becomes only a memory.

Other students come to college less interested in questions of personal integrity or social responsibility. They may have done some volunteer work and found it discouraging or unexciting; they may find politics confusing or even repellent. Reaching this group of students—awakening in them broader concerns and giving them a sense that they can grasp and contribute to the complicated realities of civic and political life—is at least as important as reaching those who are more immediately receptive. Weaving moral and civic issues into the heart of the curriculum offers the best hope of connecting with the hard-to-reach students and making sure that students already on an inspired path will not lose their way.

At Wayne State University, political science professor Otto Feinstein teaches a required, introductory American government course that provides 300 students a year with a powerful experience in political participation. In addition to lectures and readings, in the Youth Urban Agenda component, students work together in small groups to create five- to 10-point political agendas.

Then they conduct background research relating to their proposed agendas, articulating the issues and showing why they are important; identifying which groups have a stake in a particular issue and how they could be reached; searching for solutions, including public policies that would effectively respond to the identified need; and developing a strategy for pursuing the agenda. At the end of the research phase, each group elects delegates to an Urban Agenda Convention, which is charged with developing a common political agenda for Wayne State and the Detroit community.

The Youth Urban Agenda Project has moved beyond the walls of the university to include students in many local public schools and adult education classes, as well as several schools.
overseas. The democratic agenda-building conventions give those involved a political voice; and, by developing concrete strategies for addressing issues they care about, students also learn the skills of constructive political participation.

Among other things, students organize public information campaigns on behalf of their agendas by broadcasting the conventions on cable television, delivering petitions on the agenda to public officials, publicly interviewing candidates about their views on the Urban Agenda, and mounting community outreach programs. They also conduct voter registration drives and surveys on key issues.

There is evidence that students’ involvement in the intensive agenda-building and implementation process contributes very positively to their political involvement. A survey of 300 college students who took part in these activities found that they showed significantly higher rates of voting in the state primary elections and were more likely to expect to work in a political campaign and engage in other political activities than a comparison group of students who did not participate in the course’s political-engagement components.

Faculty development is very important if an institution wishes to integrate moral and civic concerns into the curriculum on a broad scale. Many interested faculty lack the substantive knowledge and pedagogical expertise they need to incorporate moral and civic learning into their courses and can benefit from structured seminars, ongoing discussion groups, and connections with national programs that support moral and civic education, such as Campus Compact. Institutions can also help by providing logistical support, particularly to faculty trying to connect their students with community organizations.

Our investigations have made it clear that incorporating moral and civic goals into the curriculum does not require a trade-off with more narrowly academic goals. In fact, we are convinced that the two strands of undergraduate education, disciplinary or “academic” and moral and civic, are most powerful when creatively combined. Part of the value of broadening the goals of higher education is that linking academic material to students’ lives and personal concerns and passions will lead to deeper understanding and more memorable learning of the course’s academic content.

The pedagogical approach used in civic education that has been subjected to the most empirical research is service learning (through structured reflection). The results of those studies make it clear that service learning does enhance academic performance, as well as many aspects of civic engagement. In an evaluation of a large number of service-learning programs, Alexander Astin and his colleagues found significant positive effects on grade point average, writing skills, and critical thinking skills, as well as commitment to community service, self-efficacy, and leadership ability.

There is also a body of research indicating that students’ academic performance and assessment of their own learning and motivation are increased through participation in high-quality service-learning programs. Especially those that involve challenging service work that is well-integrated with course material and is accompanied by opportunities for structured reflection on their service experience and its relation to their academic learning.

Extracurricular Programs. Although curricular attention to moral and civic development is essential, extracurricular life is also rich with sites of moral and civic engagement that can transform students. Moral and civic learning beyond the classroom includes both structured extracurricular programs and activities and many aspects of the campus culture.

Leadership programs; service activities; disciplinary, religious, and political clubs; and programs designed to foster communication and respect across groups are most directly relevant to students’ moral and civic growth, but moral and civic learning can be incorporated into virtually any kind of student activity with sensitive guidance and support from faculty and staff advisors.

Some extracurricular activities link students across many campuses around a common theme of service or civic engagement. One such program is Democracy Matters, which is based at Colgate University but now has chapters on 40 campuses. The goal of Democracy Matters is to engage students in strengthening democracy by reforming the role of money in politics. The non-partisan program educates campus coordinators in the values and skills of democracy through an eight-week tutorial and individual mentoring, so that students can create and lead chapters on their own campuses.

Through their involvement, the coordinators and other participating students become excited about politics, learn a wide range of political skills, and develop confidence in their ability to make a difference. The campus chapters carry out projects that link them with their local communities as well as with other chapters. For example, 10 chapters in New York state developed and implemented strategies for pressing gubernatorial candidates to take a stand on campaign finance reform.
Campus Culture. Other important elements in student life are located outside this kind of formal program. They are part of the ethos and sense of community at an institution. Each of the 12 campuses we visited creates a vibrant sense of mission and a palpable and distinctive culture—some quite consciously, others less deliberately.

We were almost always struck by the physical symbols of an institution’s mission and culture. For some, it is almost impossible to describe their distinctive approaches to moral and civic education without mentioning certain features of their architecture, decor, landscaping, or other aspects of their settings.

Turtle Mountain Community College, for example, is housed in a building that dramatically reflects the college’s commitment to Native American values. The building forms the abstracted shape of a thunderbird, and all the design elements reflect the college’s efforts to integrate tribal culture into the education of its students. The entrance is framed by a circle of columns, each of which has inscribed on it one of seven key teachings central to the Ojibway heritage: wisdom, peace, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth.

This physical representation of the school’s values is mirrored in the curriculum, with many of the courses weaving learning about Chippewa culture into academic and vocational preparation. In the introduction to cultural anthropology, for example, students learn about the cultural and social heritage of the people on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, on which the college is located.

In addition to physical symbols, institutional culture on many campuses was revealed in iconic stories told and retold by each new cohort of students and faculty. We heard stories about the institutions’ founding or transformation, stories about heroes, and stories of transgression against cherished norms and campus responses to those transgressions.

Two favorite stories at the College of St. Catherine concern incidents in which Sister Antonia, the founder of this Roman Catholic women’s college, defied secular and church authority to carry out her ambitious vision for the college. These stories are repeated with pride and a sense that the women of the College of St. Catherine today aspire to the same kind of courage and independence.

The emphasis on strong and engaged women that is a notable part of the college’s campus culture is echoed in the curriculum. For example, the centerpiece of the core curriculum is a pair of interdisciplinary “bookend courses,” one taken in the first year (The Reflective Woman), the other a senior capstone course (the Global Search for Justice). The initial course is intended to help students develop frameworks for thinking about the way in which their values and lives can be informed by a range of moral, spiritual, and intellectual traditions.

The capstone course is a multidisciplinary seminar that addresses global issues of peace, meaningful work, and social justice, with the intention of helping students “develop the discipline and consciousness needed to change oppressive systemic conditions and reshape their world.” By incorporating the same themes in coursework and in student life outside the classroom, the College of St. Catherine creates an integrated, mutually reinforcing environment for supporting moral and civic development.

Of course, institutional culture is inevitably complex, and various constituencies, subcultures, and incidents can convey conflicting messages. Prominent among these messages are the reactions of administrative leaders and faculty to problems that arise when cherished values conflict, as they inevitably will. These conflicts can be very public and contentious and therefore are not generally welcomed by college and university administrations. But if handled well, the very fact that they are so public enhances their scope and impact. Handling them well is far from easy to do, however, and highlights the importance of the moral qualities of the president and others in leadership roles—the need for administrative leaders to demonstrate wisdom and judgment.

Student activism frequently provides the catalyst for teachable moments. Over the years, student groups have held protests against the war in Vietnam and for civil rights; demonstrations to urge campus to divest from South Africa; rallies in support of organizing agricultural workers, many of whom are immigrants; protests demanding better working conditions and wages for college service workers; and, more recently, demonstrations for and against the war in Iraq and in support of both Israelis and Palestinians.

When these issues involve problems directly related to the campus, as many student protests do, they often entail conflicts between different groups of students. These conflicts can be especially powerful teachable moments, because they require students to learn how to deal constructively with competing interests within a community. In the spring of 2001, for example, a full-page advertisement was offered to many student newspapers. The ad was titled “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea For Blacks—and Racist Too [sic].” The 10 points included claims that blacks as well as whites benefited from slavery and that reparations have already been paid to African Americans in the form of welfare benefits and racial preferences.

Most student newspapers rejected the ad, generally on grounds that it was racist. Some papers printed it, often with explosive results. Students destroyed thousands of copies of the paper bearing the ad at Brown University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. The anti-reparation ad raised complicated issues related to competing values—questions involving free speech.
and press on the one hand and words that deeply offended some members of a campus on the other.

When issues of race are involved, it is enormously difficult to avoid polarizing the campus. But students at some institutions recognized that this could also be the occasion for promoting serious dialogue about complicated social and economic issues related to the legacy of slavery and about the nature of a campus community: What is owed the descendants of slaves and why? What should be the limits on viewpoints expressed on college campuses and in student newspapers? What should happen when those limits are exceeded?

At Stanford University, the student paper ran the ad as a guest column on one page and printed a response by the Stanford Black Student Union on the facing page. This approach opened the issue to discussion in an atmosphere of reasoned debate, and although there were strong negative responses to the ad, these responses occurred as part of an ongoing exchange and did not involve the angry thefts and attacks that occurred elsewhere.

**Honor Codes.** National studies show that academic cheating in college has increased considerably since the 1960s, which has led more campuses to consider honor codes and how they can be implemented effectively. This is a positive development for moral and civic education, because strong honor codes and the kinds of conversations they stimulate not only help deter academic dishonesty, they also seem to raise consciousness about a wider range of moral issues and foster a climate of trust, civility, self-restraint, and mutual respect, according to research by Derek Bok, Sally Cole, and Diana Conklin.

**Lessons Learned**

Much of our fieldwork gave us cause for optimism, particularly our visits to campuses that make moral and civic education a central priority. All 12 of those we studied in some depth are characterized by approaches that are intentional, holistic, and designed to reach all of their students. Although there has been no research comparing them to colleges and universities with less far-reaching programs, our site visits gave us the strong impression that this more intentional approach has a greater impact on more students. But a comprehensive approach is not the only way to provide effective moral and civic education. There is much that interested administrators, faculty, and program staff members can do to build moral and civic education efforts even at schools where that endeavor is not a campus-wide commitment.

Since the publication of *Educating Citizens*, a number of efforts have been launched that build on lessons learned in our work and the work of others. One example is an initiative called the American Democracy Project, sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in collaboration with *The New York Times*. This three-year project involves 145 AASCU institutions interested in adopting a comprehensive approach to students' civic engagement, and includes programs and activities that involve the curriculum and campus culture as well as those that are extracurricular. *The New York Times* will play a key role in working with participating campuses to promote thoughtful student dialogue about—and engagement in—contemporary issues of civic concern. The presidents and chancellors of all the campuses taking part have committed themselves to participating actively in the project.

The project was launched last summer with a meeting of the provosts and chief academic officers, who read *Educating Citizens* and several essays on civic engagement as background for their meeting. The attendees are now organizing conversations on their own campuses, which will be used to develop campus plans to promote the civic engagement of their students, and they are also helping AASCU and *The New York Times* to develop a national agenda around civic issues of concern to students. At their next meeting, in the summer of 2004, they will share their campus plans and lessons learned. In the interim, the topic will be on the agenda at the next meetings of both the AASCU presidents and chancellors and their chief academic officers.

Another promising initiative is the Center for Liberal Education and Civic Engagement, a partnership between Campus Compact and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). The center, headed by Donald Harward, the former president of Bates College, acts as both a catalyst and incubator of innovations and ideas for making civic engagement integral to liberal education and responsible citizenship. It supports research as well as collaborations between campuses and their external communities.

Although we recognize that moral and civic learning are not priorities on most campuses now, we hope and expect that these recent initiatives and others like them will help to change this reality. We were particularly struck, though, in the course of our work to find repeatedly that two dimensions of moral and civic learning are particularly short-changed by colleges and universities.
One dimension concerns undergraduates’ political engagement, even with “political” defined broadly to include all activities intended to influence social and political institutions, beliefs, and practices or to affect processes and policies relating to community welfare. The other gap is in assessment of the actual effects of the moral and civic education programs under way.

Our research convinced us that both of these areas need more attention, and they are the focus of a new three-year Political Engagement Project at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. We have begun a study of the impact on participating students of 21 programs that have the explicit goal of educating for political understanding and engagement.

Although the 21 courses and programs have a wide array of goals and employ many different strategies, we have identified four goals and six pedagogies for special attention. The goals are political identity, efficacy, skills, and deliberation/decision-making. The pedagogies are community placements, interaction with political leaders, political action projects, political research projects, political discussion and debate, and critical reflection.

For the Future

Our fieldwork and the current applications of what we have learned in many institutions have given us the sense that interest is growing in supporting undergraduates’ development as ethical, committed, and engaged human beings and citizens. We certainly hope this is the case, because our country and world are facing challenges that require, perhaps more than ever, citizens who educate themselves about the issues, think hard about what is right, speak up, and take action as creatively and strategically as they can.

The global turmoil that preoccupies so many of us now underscores the importance of the moral and civic life of our nation at every level. If we are to meet today’s challenges and those of the future, we must do all we can to ensure that succeeding generations gain the understanding, motivation, and skills needed to preserve and promote our highest democratic ideals.