Civic Professionalism: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Liberal Arts Education

Status Report

September 2013

Project Overview

This project, made possible through the generosity of the Teagle Foundation, focuses on “Civic Professionalism” as a roadmap for transforming educational practice through a dual focus on faculty work and student learning. It seeks to interweave the traditional strengths of the liberal arts, the values of civic inquiry and reflection, and the practical work of sustaining and supporting our communities and ourselves. We employ the term civic professionalism to mark the intersection of formal knowledge, vocational exploration/development, and a commitment to the common good.

Six institutions are participating in this project, with each pursuing its own institutionally specific strategies for putting civic professionalism into action. Faculty members and academic staff from each institution are challenged to alter their pedagogical practices on multiple levels and to engage with the organizational structures of their departments and schools in order to impart to students a civically engaged, critical education integrating professional possibilities. This project seeks to understand how faculty work and institutional structures need to adapt to sustain this focus. Because each of these projects is designed to integrate with the curricular, co-curricular, and other institutional structures that shape faculty work, they are also intended to alter those structures in ways that accommodate and encourage these forms of work and consequently, student learning. One group is focusing on building the capacity of faculty members to integrate civic professionalism into curricula and other structures (Auburn University, Macalester College, and Syracuse University). The other group is changing structures directly, which will, in turn, affect faculty work (Drew University, Millsaps College, and University of Miami).

We have completed the first year of our two-year project. The funds we received have supported collaborative efforts among members of the initiative’s consortium as well as specific strategies for putting civic professionalism into action at our six institutions. During the past year, Drs. Amy Koritz, Paul Schadewald, Robin Bachin, Brigitta B. Brunner-Johnson, Catherine Gerard, Giovanna Summerfield, Bob Storey, and Kenneth Townsend, in collaboration with the Imagining America staff, have made progress toward the goals set forth in our grant proposal.
Learning from Challenges and Opportunities

Reflecting upon the challenges and opportunities of the past year, we identified two themes that will shape the future collaborative work of the consortium as well as the six demonstration projects. Based on these themes, we hope to refine our collective vision of civic professionalism at the 2013 IA national conference.

Through our work this year, we learned that the debate and tension between workforce development and the traditional liberal arts continues to prevail. Although this tension exists in certain disciplines and institutions more than others, it confirms the urgent need to reshape faculty work and student learning with the civic professionalism framework. As subsequently discussed, the challenge to recruit faculty from the humanities and the need to reimagine faculty members’ professional identities exemplify this point.

Recruiting faculty to participate in the demonstration projects proved to be difficult for some consortium members, partly because civic professionalism is not something that seemed to resonate with certain faculty at their institution. This led us to raise several questions: (1) How do we make civic professionalism resonate with humanities-based scholars? (2) How do we make this concept relevant for faculty who are in fields where there is not a clear path between formal knowledge and students’ vocational development? (3) What can institutions that had success with recruiting and engaging faculty from the humanities share with those institutions that struggled?

Although discipline or institutional culture may influence the degree to which faculty members embrace the idea of civic professionalism, the nature of faculty work and professional identity may also contribute. So how do we help faculty see civic professionalism as part of their own professional identity? The nature of advising may be key. If faculty members are to prepare students to be civic professionals, they will have to advise for vocation beyond the major.

Our efforts of this past year also enabled us to conceptualize a continuum that captures the different approaches an institution can take to integrating civic professionalism into faculty work and student learning. Schadewald described this continuum based on his work on Macalester’s demonstration project, although it is also consistent with the observations and experiences of the other institution’s project leaders. Three points on the continuum are as follows:

1. A highly integrated model of academic work, civic reflection, and vocational exploration that is grounded in a particular program or academic initiative. Faculty and staff share expertise across divisions and build the
capacity of one another;

2. A “networked model” where civic professionalism is not “integrated” in an area or program, but rather academic departments or areas intentionally network with other administrative areas of the college. Each retains their own expertise but they are intentionally networked; and

3. A diffuse model, where people have a general sense of where to refer students; academic fields are not as integrated. A lot of responsibility is placed on the student for navigating to find her/his own resources. The job of faculty/staff is to provide a good map or referrals for students. Knowledge and skills are kept distinct among departments.

Where individual faculty members or departments find themselves on this continuum depends on the field. For example, certain disciplines have languages for talking about the “professional” and the civic; other humanities do not have such language or emphases. Some of the placement also stems from the graduate training that individual faculty members have received. Our observations this year point to a strong indication that graduate training did not prepare faculty members equally to engage these issues—or perhaps even discouraged students’ interest in them. However, we noted that those students who had experience in the “real world” along with their graduate training could provide models for a more integrated approach of civic reflection, vocation, and academic work. No single, perfect model exists; however, we would like to see more highly integrated models in which the advising capacities of faculty members are enhanced and in which students find a more integrated experience.

Concluding Thoughts

Based on the collaborative work of the consortium members and the institutions’ progress on the demonstration projects, we sense that the task of reshaping faculty work is now different from when we began this endeavor. Thus, at this point, we ask, “How can faculty reimage themselves in relation to undergraduate students in order to prepare civic professionals?” We head into the next year of our work on this project with the goal of beginning to find an answer to this question.

Select Institutional Project Recent Updates

**Auburn University:** The Academy for Civic Professionalism (ACP) is a 3-day workshop for up to 25 national and international faculty in the arts and humanities who are interested in incorporating civic engagement/service learning practices into their courses, outreach scholarship, and promotion and tenure documentation. Sessions at the ACP will explore and uncompact the topic of civic professionalism, as well as ways to incorporate its tenets into research, teaching, and practice. Last year ACP hosted 11 faculty members from Mexico and 4 from Auburn; this year the same institutions will attend together with other national and international faculty from interested institutions.
The speakers for the 2014 ACP are Harry Boyte, Julie Hatcher, and Lorraine McIlrath.

In addition, they are planning to add two new components to the Academy. The first will be the viewing and discussion of a documentary demonstrating the impact of civic professionalism in the community. They plan to invite community leaders and K–12 teachers to this event to broaden the scope of the ACP. The second addition will be an award for ACP Alumni who are finding success with their civic professionalism courses and research.

**Drew University:** The purpose of the Teagle-funded Engaged Undergraduate Education pilot project at Drew University is to address a gap in offerings at Drew that might help students explore and prepare for work in the non-profit or “alternative economy” sectors.

An interdisciplinary planning group has developed a program model consisting of two components: an integrative Community-Based Learning (CBL) course combined with selected allied courses as co-requisites. The integrative CBL course, “Community and Vocation: Colloquium on Nonprofits and the Alternative Economy” integrates the study of nonprofit organizations and the “alternative economy” with hands-on work in organizations in New Jersey and New York. The allied co-requisite courses may be offered in variety of departments, allowing students to approach the wide range of organizations and missions found in the non-profit and alternative economy sectors from the perspective of a specific field of interest.

Together the allied courses and the integrative colloquium will result in students achieving the following learning goals: 1) Gain knowledge about the history, functions, and structures of non-profit and alternative economy organizations; 2) Understand theories/conceptual frameworks for analyzing how race, class, power, and forms of action are deployed and operate within these organizations; and 3) Gain practical experience working for an organization in these sectors or on a project requested by such an organization.

**University of Miami:** Faculty in the History Department in the College of Arts and Sciences will collaborate with faculty in the School of Education’s Human and Social Development program and the School of Communication’s journalism program to build civic professionalism into their courses and propose how to embed civic professionalism into their respective majors.

At the second Imagining America Faculty Collaborative (IAFC) meeting, members discussed two readings: Thomas Bender’s “Then and Now: The Disciplines and Civic Engagement” and William Sullivan’s “Can Professionalism Still Be A Viable Ethic?” The collaborative also discussed a) the challenges of promoting civic engagement within the arts and humanities; b) methods to bring awareness to this university-wide interdisciplinary effort across to promote civic professionalism; and c) the most effective way to implement the logic model in
their respective fields.

At the third meeting of the IAFC, Scotney Evans, Assistant Professor in the School of Education and Human Development, led a reflection workshop. Prior to the meeting, the faculty collaborative read “Reflection: Linking Service and Learning—Linking Students and Communities” by Janet Eyler. The purpose of this workshop was to develop ideas for how the faculty could help students achieve deeper levels of learning by more effectively linking their service experiences to the learning objectives of the course.

In October, Journalism faculty will present course proposals for civic engagement, including one local and one international course. They will provide some context about the public journalism movement and its fit with the IAFC’s definitions of civic professionalism.