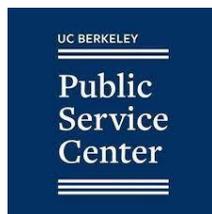


**Our Democratic Imperative:
The Role of Higher Education in Developing Students' Civic Identities
Call for Proposals**

The *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* (MJCSL), in partnership with the Haas Center for Public Service and UC-Berkeley Public Service Center, is pleased to invite proposals for a special section that explores the impact of postsecondary efforts that involve students in public service and civic engagement on the development of healthy civic identities. The section will be guest edited by Tom Schnaubelt, Sandra Bass, Kristy Lobo, and Luke Terra and will be included in the Summer 2023 issue of MJCSL.

MJCSL is an open-access, peer reviewed journal focusing on research, theory, pedagogy and other matters related to civic engagement, academic service-learning, campus-community partnerships, and engaged/public scholarship in higher education. Learn more about the goals of the journal on [our website](#).



SPECIAL SECTION CONTEXT

Democracies across the globe are under threat.¹ Ronald Daniels, president of Johns Hopkins and author of *What Universities Owe Democracy*, suggests that institutions of higher learning “have a responsibility to act in defense of the liberal democratic experience as institutions that enrich and are enriched by democracy, and are inextricably intertwined with democracy’s values and ends.” Virtually every college or university nods to this responsibility in their vision or mission statement. However, Scott Bass, Laura McMahon Fulford, and Ashley Finley issued a report in 2021 based on an Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) survey of senior university administrators that found:

“...strengthening civic and democratic engagement, re-envisioning and supporting liberal arts majors, and addressing the responsibility of higher education to contest the spread of misinformation were ranked among the lowest priorities for senior administrators...”

This lack of concern should be particularly unsettling to those of us leading postsecondary service-learning and civic engagement efforts. University leaders need to be able to connect our collective role in strengthening civic and democratic engagement, re-envisioning and supporting liberal arts education, and addressing the spread of misinformation to the other symptoms outlined in the AAC&U report to ensure the future of American higher education.

For years, practitioners and researchers in our field have, for good reason, focused on service-

¹ Efforts to monitor and assess democracies globally by organizations such as [Freedom House](#), the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#), the Varieties of Democracy Project ([V-Dem](#)), Stanford’s [Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law](#), and others have documented declines in democratic practice internationally.

learning, civic engagement, and community partnerships as a process, often lamenting that too much attention is paid to student outcomes and not enough attention is paid to community outcomes in the design and implementation of singular learning experiences. At the same time, some have suggested that research on student civic learning outcomes lacks rigor, in part because of the lack of shared definitions, frameworks, or collective understanding of higher education's intended outcomes related to our imperative to educate for Democracy. Thomas Ehrlich, Bob Bringle, and others have consistently raised concerns that service-learning—and, we would add, service-learning scholarship—has remained too detached from public policy, political engagement, and democratic practice.

This volume seeks to sharpen our collective vision for our intended student outcomes, particularly as it relates to the educational goals of advancing democratic equality and achieving our civic mission. We assert that our collective outcomes in this area can be thought of as cultivating a healthy civic identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature on the concept of “civic identity” reveals that it is both intuitive and amorphous. Hart, Richardson, and Wilkenfeld (2011) suggest that civic identity can be understood as “a set of beliefs and emotions about oneself as a participant in civic life.” Others outline a more developmental understanding of civic identity. Matthew Johnson (2017) offers a developmental perspective that is aligned with a competency model in suggesting that civic identity is “an identity category comprising one’s knowledge, attitudes, values, and actions regarding civic engagement.” [A Crucible Moment](#), the 2012 report issued by the AAC&U National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, drew upon Caryn McTighe Musil’s idea that citizenship is developed in distinct phases, moving from “exclusionary” through “oblivious,” “naive,” “charitable,” “reciprocal,” and, finally, “generative.”

Butin and colleagues (2012) compiled an expansive review of various postsecondary institutional articulations of core competencies in civic engagement, which can be viewed as defining characteristics (or key building blocks) of a healthy civic identity. L. Lee Knefelkamp (2008) describes civic identity as an attempt to *locate one’s self in community* and names four essential characteristics:

- a) it is developed through engagement with others;
- b) it is distinct from, but deeply connected to, complex intellectual and ethical development;
- c) it is a holistic practice that requires the integration of critical thinking and the capacity for empathy; and,
- d) it is a deliberately chosen and repeatedly enacted aspect of the self.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Because there isn’t widespread agreement on how civic identity is defined, the guest editors will not privilege any individual definition of “civic identity.” However, to begin to establish cohesion, the section will begin with an introduction that outlines four core commitments and five building blocks necessary to develop a healthy civic identity (a more expansive description of this framework can be found [here](#)).

Core Commitments

1. Commitment to the Values, Practices, and Institutions of Liberal Democracy
2. Focused Commitment(s) to an Issue(s)
3. Commitment to Integrity
4. Communitarian Mindset

Building Blocks

1. Capacity to Engage Constructively Across Difference
2. Democratic Knowledge, Habits, and Skills
3. Knowledge of Social Change Frameworks and Tools
4. Deep Content Knowledge
5. Resilient Mind, Body, and Spirit

We invite articles that contribute to our shared understanding of these building blocks and core commitments, with particular attention to efforts where student outcomes in these areas have been rigorously assessed in ways that can be replicated. Scholars may share work related to an individual core commitment or building block, or contributions that interrogate the relationship between two or more dimensions. Potential authors may also respond to these or other questions:

- How is developing a healthy civic identity related to other student learning outcomes such as moral and ethical development, critical thinking or self-reflection, critical information literacy, development of historical knowledge(s), etc.?
- Efforts to achieve social justice, and racial justice in particular, are inextricably linked to the strength and perpetuity of liberal democracy. In what ways are these connections made explicit as students form civic identities? What are examples of programs/institutions that effectively connect social justice work with the cultivation of civic identity?
- What programs are shown to be effective in cultivating healthy civic identities among diverse student populations (or students across diverse educational institutions)? What are promising practices in assessing the development of civic identities?
- How have educational institutions distinguished between civic learning and partisan politics?

Submissions will be evaluated based on how well they contribute to our collective understanding of these building blocks and core commitments.

TO SUBMIT

Before submitting, you should thoroughly review MJCSL's [proposal guidelines](#). The guest editors welcome abstracts via email for informal feedback; please inquire before May 30, 2022. Full proposals for the special section are **due July 1, 2022** and should be emailed to thomas.schnaubelt@stanford.edu. If contributors are invited to submit full manuscripts based on their proposal, the manuscript will be due December 1, 2022.

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