



**“Liberal Education for Global Citizenship:  
Renewing Macalester’s Traditions of Public Scholarship  
and Civic Learning”**

by

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The purpose of this short discussion paper is threefold: to provide an introduction to the nature, modalities and value of ‘civic engagement’; to identify some of the steps that the College is taking to strengthen our ability to do civically engaged scholarly work; and to publicize some of the activities that the CST and interested faculty will undertake over the next year or so to help Macalester become a more fully engaged campus.

## 2. WHAT IS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Civic engagement is a contemporary expression of the historic liberal arts mission of preparing students for public life as citizens and leaders. It entails a commitment to enriching public discourse on significant questions, responding to the social needs of the local and global communities in which we live, cultivating effective and ethical public leaders, encouraging civic imagination and creativity, and otherwise promoting a democratic way of life in a multicultural and increasingly globalized world.<sup>1</sup>

In practical terms, civic engagement entails a partial reconceptualization of the basic missions of the College (research, teaching, service) to include and value the civically engaged scholarly work of *public scholarship*, *civic learning*, and *public work*.

**What is Public Scholarship?** Research can be said to be civically engaged to the extent that it is conducted as ‘public scholarship’. Simply put, public scholarship is distinguished from proprietary research or work that bears primarily or exclusively on academic/disciplinary debates by the following characteristics:

- it addresses issues of pressing or persistent concern to the local and global communities in which we live;
- it provides citizens and civic leaders with the dependable knowledge necessary for reaching responsible public judgments and decisions;
- it enriches public discourse on controversial issues;
- it is directly responsive to important public concerns; and/or it enlivens democratic debate and deliberation.

Public scholarship is also distinguished by the fact that it is both available and accessible to citizens and civic leaders.

Critics sometimes suggest that public scholarship is not scholarship at all, but rather a form of activism or advocacy (and that it is therefore qualitatively different from – even antithetical to – ‘real’ scholarly work). Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. Properly understood, public scholarship simply refers to a form of research in which scholars, *as scholars*, address questions, problems and

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<sup>1</sup>Other terms related to civic engagement include: civic professionalism, social responsibility, social justice, connected knowing, public leadership, and public intellectual.

issues of public significance. This being the case, public scholarship involves the same methods and techniques of inquiry/investigation as more traditional forms of scholarship. It is also informed by the same intellectual norms and subject to the same standards of excellence. The key difference is that purposes of research are *public* or *civic* rather than disciplinary or proprietary and that they are accessible to the relevant public.

**What is Civic Learning?** Teaching can be said to be civically engaged to the degree that it promotes 'civic learning'. Civic learning involves cultivating in students the intellectual and practical skills, competencies and habits of mind necessary for them to become effective citizens and civic leaders in a multicultural/multicivilizational and increasingly globalized world. At a minimum, these 'civic competencies' include:

- a capacity for critical thinking;
- an ability to think and express oneself both rigorously and creatively;
- a capacity to address the 'big' issues/questions confronting society and to place more specialized knowledge in a broader historical, social, political, ethical and cultural context;
- an appreciation of the challenges confronting the local and global communities in which we live;
- a willingness to address those challenges;
- a capacity for responsible participation/leadership in private, associational, and public organizations and institutions;
- a capacity to engage in civil discourse and deliberation;
- tolerance of the differences that one encounters in a multicultural and globalizing world;
- a sense of personal and social responsibility/agency; and
- a capacity for life-long learning and civic leadership.

Although civic learning often takes place in conventional classroom settings, it can also occur outside the classroom through a range of action research, service-learning, internship, and other community-based learning experiences.

**What is Public Work?** Service can be said to be civically engaged insofar as it is conducted as Public Work. Public Work is professional work that enriches public life, addresses public problems, enlivens democratic discourse and practice, and that otherwise contributes to the construction of a more just, humane, and peaceful world.

### 3. WHY SHOULD MACALESTER BE CIVICALLY ENGAGED?

There are several reasons why Macalester should be civically engaged. Among the more important of these are:

**The traditional liberal arts mission:** Liberal arts colleges have always been committed to the preparation of students for effective citizenship and civic

leadership. Viewed historically, the current emphasis on civic engagement is nothing more than an updating of this mission to make it relevant and meaningful to the world of the early twenty-first century.

**The college's traditions and core values:** Preparing students for effective citizenship and responsible civic leadership has been an important part of Macalester's mission for more than a half century. In our *Statement of Purpose and Belief*, we affirm our commitment to this vocation by asserting that

*[Students] should be able to apply their understanding of theories to address problems in the larger community... We believe that the benefit of the educational experience at Macalester is the development of individuals who make informed judgments and interpretations of the broader world around them and choose actions or beliefs for which they are willing to be held accountable.*

Most recently, the Macalester College Board of Trustees underscored our commitment in this area when it adopted the following resolution in January, 2002:

*Resolved, that the College is hereby committed, as an element of its mission, to provide a learning experience that, among its values, serves to instill in its students an active and abiding sense of civic responsibility. The College further embraces the conviction that the processes and institutions of a healthy democracy offer to every citizen an opportunity, and establish for every citizen a responsibility, to contribute significantly to a more inclusive, just and compassionate society. Pursuant to this commitment, the College will develop and administer an ongoing program that is designed appropriately to engage all constituencies of the institution.*

**Student interest/demand:** Our students are keenly interested both in *being* civically engaged and in *preparing* for a life of civic leadership. This is evidenced by their participation in courses, experiential learning opportunities, and campus activities that address issues of pressing concern or that are responsive to the needs of the local or global communities in which they live. It is also clearly reflected in both the NSSE and DEEP surveys of student engagement on campus. Civically engaged activities are often described as among the most fulfilling activities in students' careers at the College. Increasing opportunities for engagement are therefore likely to enrich student's experiences and deepen their positive associations with the College.

**Faculty interest/demand:** Many Macalester faculty are already deeply involved in public scholarship, civic learning and public work. This is evidenced in the number of courses with a civic engagement component; the range of faculty initiatives (such as the quantitative methods for public policy program) designed to foster civic competencies; the variety of public scholarship projects undertaken by faculty; and the involvement of faculty in a wide range of outreach/service activities. Interest in civic engagement has also been a recurring theme in several faculty

conversations over the past few years (for example, in a number of campus-wide focus groups sponsored by the Mellon and Hewlett programs; in the core values discussions, and in the strategic directions process). In these course of these conversations, large numbers of faculty expressed both sustained support for civic engagement and a desire to have the College do more to implement this pillar of the institutional mission..

#### 4. HOW CIVICALLY ENGAGED IS MACALESTER TODAY?

Civic engagement is nothing new to Macalester. Indeed, the College has been involved in what we would now call civic engagement for at least the last half-century – and has received both regional and national recognition for its efforts in this regard. The following examples provide a broad brush picture of the way in which Macalester is civically engaged today.

##### **Public Scholarship:**

Macalester faculty and students are involved in a variety of research projects and programs that address issues of public relevance or that are responsive to community needs. Examples include:

- ***East Side Community Outreach Research Projects:*** The College is collaborating with the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and Metropolitan State University (under a \$400,000 grant from HUD) on 'action research' projects in the economically depressed and racially diverse neighborhood of East St. Paul. These projects involve inter-disciplinary student-faculty teams conducting research requested by local nonprofit, governmental or neighborhood organizations;
- ***Action Research projects:*** Faculty in various departments and programs are engaged in action research. Some of this research involves students as collaborators in summer projects. A number of courses also encourage students to do research that is of public significance or that responds directly to community need.

##### **Civic Learning:**

In addition to traditional coursework (which develops civic competencies through the cultivation of a capacity for critical thinking, research and problem-solving skills, etc), the College offers strong curricular and co-curricular programs specifically designed to promote civic learning. Examples include:

- ***Coursework:*** according to a review of courses taken by the Class of 2000, 426 graduates took an aggregate total of 921 courses that develop civic competencies (though service-learning or some other pedagogy). Many of these courses also dealt with issues of race, racism and the importance of tolerance in a multicultural and globalizing world;

- **Civic Learning Abroad:** many students participate in service-learning and other forms of civic learning programs as part of their study abroad experience;
- **The Pluralism and Unity Program:** This program involves the participation of thirty first-year students, accompanied by faculty and staff, in a series of 'community engagements' with local civic, government and arts leaders in the Twin Cities area so they can gain the skills needed to work in racially and socially diverse environments;
- **The Off-Campus Student Employment Program:** This program allows students to fulfill their financial aid work-study obligations by serving in a non-profit community organization;
- **Internships:** The College places interns in a variety of work settings (including health care, criminal justice, environment, community organizing, social justice advocacy, education, social work, community service and government) where they can develop civic competencies. About 55% of Macalester students complete internship during their time at the College. Each year, more Macalester students intern with more than 60 agencies.

### **Public Work**

Many Macalester faculty are engaged in a range of professional activities that enrich public life, address public problems, enliven democratic discourse and practice, or otherwise contribute to the construction of more just, humane, and peaceful communities.

## **5. WHAT MORE DOES MACALESTER NEED TO DO?**

Despite the fact that Macalester has a long and enviable record when it comes to civic engagement, faculty and others members of the campus community continue to express the view that more can and must be done if we are to realize the service goals and aspirations articulated in our *Statement of Purpose and Belief*. Specifically, there is a sense on campus that more can and should be done in the following domains:

**Public Scholarship:** Ideally, at a pre-eminent liberal arts college, *public scholarship* – ie. research in which scholars, *as scholars*, address questions, problems and issues of public significance – should constitute a significant portion of the scholarly work done by both students and faculty (ie., every student should have the opportunity to work on such a piece of scholarship). For Macalester to become more fully engaged, steps will have to be taken to encourage faculty and students to build on existing activities to make public scholarship a more significant element of the scholarly life of the College. Such steps might include increasing support for *action research* projects, promoting

public scholarship across the curriculum, developing a competitive public scholarship fellowship program to increase the profile and prestige of this form of scholarly work; and providing concrete incentives/opportunities for departments and programs to consider how they might adapt the logic of public scholarship to their own distinctive (inter)disciplinary contexts.

**Civic Learning:** Ideally, a liberal arts education is grounded in systematic, intentional and sustained efforts to promote *civic learning*. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including *service-learning*, diversity education, participation in ‘community development’ or ‘community building’ activities, involvement in work that has public meaning and lasting public impact, participation in the political process, and active participation in traditional courses that address issues of public relevance and otherwise prepare students to be citizen-leaders. Despite the fact that considerable civic learning already takes place across the campus, if Macalester is to approximate more closely the ideal, steps will have to be taken to encourage faculty to consider how they might adapt these pedagogical approaches to their own distinctive (inter)disciplinary contexts. Efforts will also have to be made to support and encourage faculty as they attempt to adapt the curriculum in ways that promote civic learning and cultivate civic competencies.

**Public work:** On a fully engaged campus, faculty would be encouraged to perform service that is civically engaged. Although many of our colleagues are already involved in this kind of public work, the College needs to do a better job of encouraging, recognizing and rewarding this form of civic engagement.

There is also a sense that if Macalester is to become more fully engaged, steps will have to be taken to develop institutional norms, structures and practices that actively encourage and support civic engagement. Simply put, a commitment to civic engagement means that we will have to take modest but concrete steps to:

- encourage and support those faculty who are already actively engaged in the local and global communities in which we live;
- assist those faculty who would like to become more engaged but aren’t sure how to go about it; and,
- heighten awareness of the nature, value and potential payoffs of this form of scholarly work.

Such steps might include revising tenure and promotion guidelines in ways that promote public scholarship and civic learning; providing practical support for faculty who wish to be more civically engaged; facilitating service-learning; making courses with substantial public scholarship and/or civic learning components part of the general education requirement of the college; providing practical support for faculty initiatives (like the quantitative reasoning program) that bring students and faculty together to address public problems and develop civic competencies; and creating an institutional structure that can support, promote and facilitate civic engagement across the curriculum in a sustained fashion.

At this point, it is worth anticipating two common reservations expressed by faculty in connection with civic engagement:

***First, it is important to note that the goal of greater engagement does not mean that all faculty, departments and programs have to become more civically engaged.*** Some are already deeply involved in this form of scholarly work; while others may conclude that they can best contribute to the College's mission in other ways. It does, however, mean that the College as a whole must make a concerted effort to support those who are interested in doing civically engaged scholarly work in and beyond the classroom.

***Second, it is also important to note that making a greater commitment to civic engagement does not mean sacrificing academic excellence.*** As argued above, this is a false dichotomy. It might mean, however, that we have to reconsider what we mean by 'academic excellence' in relationship to the traditional mission of a liberal arts college (preparing students for effective citizenship and civic leadership). One way of thinking about this relationship is to think of the elements of our mission as being articulated to one another in the following way: *academic excellence for civic engagement in a multicultural and globalizing world.*

## **6. WHAT ARE WE DOING TO MAKE MACALESTER MORE CIVICALLY ENGAGED?**

If we really want to enhance the capacity of faculty, students and others to be more fully engaged in the local and global communities in which we live, we need to take concrete steps to build on the civically engaged work that is already being done on campus. With this in mind, interested faculty are working with and through the CST to promote, support and facilitate civic engagement on campus. Specific examples of this work include:

- the creation of a faculty working group to provide leadership in connection with civic engagement;
- the development and piloting of a faculty initiative called *Quantitative Methods for Public Policy* (QM4PP);
- planning for a faculty initiative designed to promote public scholarship in coursework across the disciplines (called *Public Scholarship Across the Curriculum*);



- pre-planning for a faculty initiative to create a competitive *Public Scholarship Fellowship Program*;
- the development of a faculty initiative to integrate civic learning for global citizenship into coursework across the disciplines (called *Liberal Education for Global Citizenship*);
- the implementation over the next year or so of an ‘engaged departments’ initiative intended to strengthen the civic engagement dimension of the scholarly life of the College’s departments (called the *Engaged Departments Initiative*);
- the implementation of a range of supporting activities (such as developing an inventory of faculty civic engagement interests and activities; and studying the cultural and structural impediments to civic engagement);
- the organization of a number of faculty professional development and curriculum development initiatives (such as summer workshops, faculty reading groups) under the auspices of the CST; and,
- the creation of an organizational framework that will facilitate cooperation between interested faculty and the various staff offices involved in civic engagement (esp. the Community Service and Internship offices).<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that none of these initiatives have been driven by external forces or short-term grant opportunities. Nor have they been ‘imposed’ by the College’s senior leadership or trustees. Rather, they have emerged either directly or indirectly out of faculty interest, activities and aspirations.

The College has secured external funding to help us implement these initiatives. In addition to grants from the Hewlett and Mellon Foundations (elements of which are focused on supporting civic engagement), we have received \$50,000 grant from Project Pericles (plus another \$50,000 in matching funds) for the express purpose of enhancing civic engagement. Pericles is a national initiative the purpose of which is to help institutions of higher education ‘adopt a transforming educational agenda – one that integrates education for socially responsible citizenship into institutional cultures’. Taken together, these grants provide the College with the resources necessary to undertake the curricular innovations and to make the structural and cultural changes necessary if Macalester is to renew and revitalize its commitment to civic engagement and the preparation of students for lives as effective citizen-leaders.

Your colleagues would like to invite you to participate in this exciting initiative. If you are interested in any aspect of the Center’s civic engagement programming, please contact Andrew Latham (Political Science) at [latham@macalester.edu](mailto:latham@macalester.edu)

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<sup>2</sup>In order to promote close cooperation, the Macalester Pericles initiatives is jointly administered by one faculty member (the Associate Director of the CST) and one staff person (the Director of the Community Service Office).