

The Useful Citizen*

The call for increased civic engagement of our young people is not a new one; it has echoed through history, ancient and modern, in the experiments of democracy. And while each generation claims they stand at a crossroads of singular importance, the need for our students to develop as active and responsible citizens is magnified by urgency in the face of global crises brought about by climate change, economic disparity, religious extremism...pick your poison. I have no idea what the world will look like in 40 years, but I do know that it will not be my world; it belongs to those we teach. Why then, do we not expend more effort in teaching them how to be shapers of history and not just subjects or even victims of it? Of course we need nurses and teachers and accountants and writers and scientists, but we also desperately need all these people to be aware of and engaged in the political art of life, which is more than the maintenance of community. That art is about self-appropriation, commitment, moral elevation, and true evolution.

We in higher education have the most extraordinary opportunity to leverage our roles as teachers and mentors to help our students begin to acquire the skills of living for the greater common good. This is not simply registering them to vote (though that is a good beginning!), it is offering them the space for reflection on what it means to be a person who lives and contributes actively to the human community. It means creating the context for experiences that help them to fuse conceptual frameworks with content rich practices. It entails having conversations about why our disciplines really matter to all of us, and that should be easy because they really do.

This issue on civic engagement offers the reader a variety of approaches to thinking about what can be done in the college classroom to encourage civic engagement, how civic engagement improves learning, and why we should be incorporating discourse on civic engagement and opportunities for it into our individual classes and institutional curricula. I hope you are inspired.



Editor-in-Chief

*"You will ever remember that all the end of study is to make you a good man and a useful citizen" (John Adams, in a letter to his son, 1781)