



Campus Compact

Campus Compact is a national coalition of almost 1,200 college and university presidents — representing more than 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education.

We are the only higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement. We promote public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, help campuses build productive community partnerships, and provide resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum.

Campus Compact membership includes public, private, two- and four-year institutions across the spectrum of higher education. These institutions put into practice the ideal of civic engagement by sharing knowledge and resources with their communities, creating economic development and initiatives, and supporting service-learning and service efforts in key areas such as literacy, health care, hunger, homelessness, nutrition, Veterans affairs, the environment, and senior services.

continued on next pg

Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education

As presidents of colleges and universities, both private and public, large and small, two-year and four-year, we challenge higher education to re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal. We also challenge higher education to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities. We have a fundamental task to renew our role as agents of our democracy. This task is both urgent and long-term. There is growing evidence of disengagement of many Americans from the communal life of our society in general, and from the responsibilities of democracy in particular. We share a special concern about the disengagement of college students from democratic participation. A chorus of studies reveals that students are not connected to the larger purposes and aspirations of the American democracy. Voter turnout is low. Feelings that political participation will not make any difference are high. Added to this, there is a profound sense of cynicism and lack of trust in the political process.

We are encouraged that more and more students are volunteering and participating in public and community service, and we have all encouraged them to do so through curricular and co-curricular activity. However, this service is not leading students to embrace the duties of active citizenship and civic participation. We do not blame these college students for their attitudes toward the democracy; rather, we take responsibility for helping them realize the values and skills of our democratic society and their need to claim ownership of it.

This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision-making. We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship.

Colleges and universities have long embraced a mission to educate students for citizenship. But now, with over two-thirds of recent high school graduates and ever-larger numbers of adults enrolling in post-secondary studies, higher education has an unprecedented opportunity to influence the democratic knowledge, dispositions, and habits of the heart that graduates carry with them into the public square.

Higher education is uniquely positioned to help Americans understand the histories and contours of our present challenges as a diverse democracy. It is also uniquely positioned to help both students and our communities to explore new ways of fulfilling the promise of justice and dignity for all, both in our own democracy and as part of the global community. We know that pluralism is a source of strength and vitality that will enrich our students' education and help them learn both to respect difference and to work together for the common good.

We live in a time when every sector —corporate, government, and nonprofit—is being mobilized to address community needs and reinvigorate our democracy. We cannot be complacent in the face of a country where one out of five children sleeps in poverty and one in six central cities has an unemployment rate 50% or more above the national average, even as our economy shows unprecedented strength. Higher education—its leaders, students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni—remains a key institutional force in our culture that can respond, and can do so without a political agenda and with the intellectual and professional capacities today's challenges so desperately demand. Thus, for society's benefit and for the academy's, we need to do more. Only by demonstrating the democratic principles we espouse can higher education effectively educate our students to be good citizens.

Our national office is based in Boston, MA with 34 state affiliates in CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NH, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VT, WA, WV, and WI. For more information about our work, including member services, resources, publications, convenings, and more, visit www.compact.org.



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Additional copies of the Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education may be obtained by calling Campus Compact, 617.357.1881 or by sending an email to campus@compact.org.

The Declaration is also available online at: www.compact.org.

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How can we realize this vision of institutional public engagement? It will, of course, take as many forms as there are types of colleges and universities. And it will require our hard work, as a whole and within each of our institutions. We will know we are successful by the robust debate on our campuses, and by the civic behaviors of our students. We will know it by the civic engagement of our faculty. We will know it when our community partnerships improve the quality of community life and the quality of the education we provide.

To achieve these goals, our presidential leadership is essential but, by itself, it is not enough. Faculty, staff, trustees, and students must help craft and act upon our civic missions and responsibilities. We must seek reciprocal partnerships with community leaders, such as those responsible for elementary and secondary education. To achieve our goals we must define them in ways that inspire our institutional missions and help measure our success.

We ask other college presidents to join us in seeking recognition of civic responsibility in accreditation procedures, Carnegie classifications, and national rankings, and to work with governors, state legislators, and state higher education offices on state expectations for civic engagement in public systems.

We believe that the challenge of the next millennium is the renewal of our own democratic life and reassertion of social stewardship. In celebrating the birth of our democracy, we can think of no nobler task than committing ourselves to helping catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of higher education. We believe that now and through the next century, our institutions must be vital agents and architects of a flourishing democracy.

We urge all of higher education to join us.

The Presidents' Declaration was drafted in 1999 by Thomas Ehrlich, senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and president emeritus of Indiana University, and Elizabeth Hollander, then executive director of Campus Compact, with input from a distinguished Presidents' Leadership Colloquium Committee composed of Derek Bok, president emeritus of Harvard University; Dolores Cross, president of Morris Brown College; John DiBiaggio, president of Tufts University; Claire Gaudiani, president of Connecticut College; Stanley Ikenberry, president of the American Council on Education; Donald Kennedy, president emeritus of Stanford University; Charles Knapp, past president of the Aspen Institute; Edward A. Malloy, president of the University of Notre Dame; Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States; and Eduardo Padrón, president of Miami-Dade College.

We are deeply indebted to the drafters of the Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University crafted by Harry Boyte of the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota and Elizabeth Hollander, with the commentary of a distinguished group of scholars, administrators, and others. Many ideas and some of the language have been used here, with the authors' permission.

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You can add your campus to the list of signatories at:

<http://www.compact.org/resources-for-presidents/presidents-declaration-on-the-civic-responsibility-of-higher-education/signatories/>