



EVERY STUDENT, EVERY DEGREE

College Civic Learning for
Today's Students & Tomorrow's
Democracy

We the People of the United States, in order to form
a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the
common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to
ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution
for the United States of America.

CIVIC ★
LEARNING for an **ENGAGED**
★ **DEMOCRACY**

Know. Experience. Act.

About the Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition

The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition brings together education and policy organizations committed to making college CLDE a priority across higher education and in public policy. The [coalition](#) is led by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, College Promise, Complete College America, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. The coalition is working in partnership with more than 75 higher education and student success organizations, including many state systems, and all seven institutional accreditation commissions.

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The coalition also thanks the countless educational trail-blazers, both on campus and in higher education organizations, who have been working for decades to revitalize civic learning to benefit both students and society. We are grateful for their inspiration and their dedication. *Every Student, Every Degree* builds on their work and invites higher education to expand and scale it.

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Democracy Is Under Threat: College Civic Learning Is Essential

WARNING SIGNS: AUTHORITARIANISM, POLARIZATION, AND SKEPTICISM

Around the world, democratic societies are in an epic struggle with the forces of authoritarianism. Freedom House, which tracks these developments, reports that in 2023, global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year. Political rights and civil liberties were reduced in 52 countries in 2023, while only 21 countries strengthened rights and liberties.¹

At home, the United States has exhibited multiple changes — growing distrust of institutions; increasingly polarized views related to economic, political, and social issues; the spread of disinformation and violence; and persistently unequal economic opportunity — that weaken confidence in our own democracy.

The United States can ensure that we emerge from this difficult era with a thriving democracy at home and renewed commitment to democracy around the globe. But we can only do so with a well-informed population that understands democracy's principles and values; believes in democratic ways of solving problems; and possesses the knowledge, skills, and motivation to ensure democracy's future.

The work of renewing democracy requires a range of skills, but it centers on engaging productively across differences and experiences. All solutions begin with finding common ground and using it to solve problems. But today, Americans find fewer and fewer opportunities to have challenging conversations and build bridges across divides that seem impossible to close. We talk past one another instead of listening, and we are rapidly losing the capacity to solve problems together.

“Democracy today [is] wrestling with the friction between our aspirations and the realities of American life.”

Melody C. Barnes, Executive Director,
University of Virginia Karsh Institute of Democracy

¹ Freedom House. (2024). *Freedom in the world 2024: The mounting damage of flawed elections and armed conflict*.

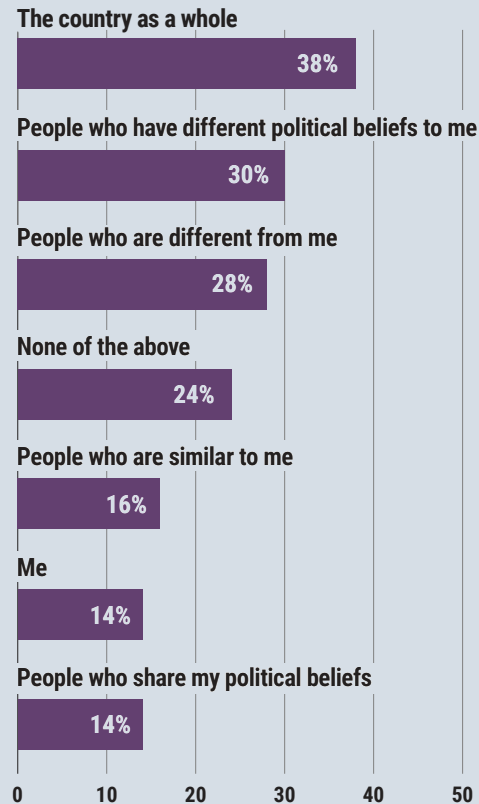
FIGURE 1

Americans' Confidence in Democracy Is Declining

Studies that show waning confidence in American democracy underscore the importance of renewing higher education's civic mission. Prioritizing college civic learning and democracy engagement is a core part of that commitment.

Americans Believe Democracy Is Working Better for Others

Who does democracy work for?



Source: Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE). (2024). *Civic language perceptions project 2024: How civic language unites, divides, & motivates American voters.*

Young People Express Low Civic Engagement and High Civic Dissatisfaction

Data from *The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America*, a survey of 18- to 24-year-olds, supports the need for civic learning in higher education.

How civically informed are young adults?

- ★ **40%** are able to correctly answer only one out of four civics questions. Only **4%** answer all four questions correctly.
- ★ **35%** say they do not feel informed enough to participate politically.

How civically engaged are young adults?

- ★ **33%** indicated no intention to participate civically – through voting, political volunteerism, donating, event attendance, or digital content creation – in 2024.
- ★ **33%** said they are not currently engaged in community activities, such as sports, hobbies, volunteerism, and faith groups.
- ★ **48%** intend to vote in the 2024 general election, significantly lower than the nationwide baseline of 68%.

Source: Institute for Citizens and Scholars. (2023, September). *The civic outlook of young adults in America: Executive summary and The civic outlook of young adults in America: Toplines.*

How civically committed are young adults?

- ★ **57%** are dissatisfied with how the U.S. political system is functioning.
- ★ **40%** are pessimistic about the future of U.S. democracy; about a quarter are somewhat or very optimistic.
- ★ **52%** report no trust at all or very little trust in government institutions.
- ★ **51%** oppose the use of violence to suppress dissent.
- ★ **68%** believe their vote matters.

NEEDED: AN EDUCATED CITIZENRY READY TO RENEW DEMOCRACY

Renewing our democracy requires intentionality and effort. But evidence suggests that we are not preparing college-educated Americans to be engaged participants in democracy. Moreover, our current political climate discourages the listening across differences that is essential for democratic ways of solving problems.

Only 28 percent of U.S. adults are satisfied with the way democracy is working in the country.² Moreover, many Americans question whether democracy is working for them. For example, in a Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement study of 5,000 registered U.S. voters, only 14 percent agree that “democracy works for me,” far fewer than the percentage who agree that democracy works for the country as a whole or for people who are different from them (Figure 1).

Moreover, an increasing number of Americans, including young people, are skeptical of U.S. democratic institutions. After surveying 4,000 18- to 24-year-olds, the Institute for Citizens and Scholars reports low engagement and high dissatisfaction with U.S. democracy. Only one-quarter of respondents are somewhat or very optimistic about democracy (Figure 1).

Voting Is Foundational, but More Is Needed

Many Americans, including younger Americans, identify “civics” with voting. Throughout both their P–12 and college studies, American students should indeed become informed and committed voters.

But education for democracy is broader and deeper than voting alone. The CLDE Framework (Figure 2) highlights the knowledge, skills, ethical lenses, and practical experiences graduates need to understand the world they are part of, consider the implications of different courses of action, determine what problems matter, and build solutions to those problems.

Finally, U.S. voting rates rank 39th among 50 world democracies.³ The United States has significant work to do in terms of educating all adults about the fundamentals of informed voting and preparing graduates for the ongoing work of building a thriving, responsive, and creative democracy. The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition is committed to leading this work.

2 Jones, J. (2024). *Record low in U.S. satisfied with way democracy is working*. Gallup.

3 DeSilver, D. (2022). *Turnout in U.S. has soared in recent elections but by some measures still trails that of many other countries*. Pew Research Center.

REASONS FOR HOPE: HIGHER EDUCATION'S CIVIC MISSION

As soon as the United States became a free nation, higher education institutions declared their commitment to help sustain that freedom. That civic mission persisted, with the Truman Commission declaring in 1947 that the *first* of higher education's *principal* purposes is to bring to all the people of the nation "[e]ducation for a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living."⁴

Over time, U.S. higher education has become one of the nation's most important resources and a dynamic catalyst for new knowledge, new innovations, and new opportunity. Above all, higher education institutions are the places where the world's most important questions are explored and where proposed approaches to these questions are rigorously tested by scholars working together, often in concert with the wider society.

Higher education's great strength comes from having the freedom to seek the truth and to evaluate competing claims to truth without fear of political interference.

Today, as authoritarian forces gain ground around the world, the future of democracy itself has become one of the world's most important questions. In this context, higher education must reclaim and revitalize its educational partnership with U.S. democracy.

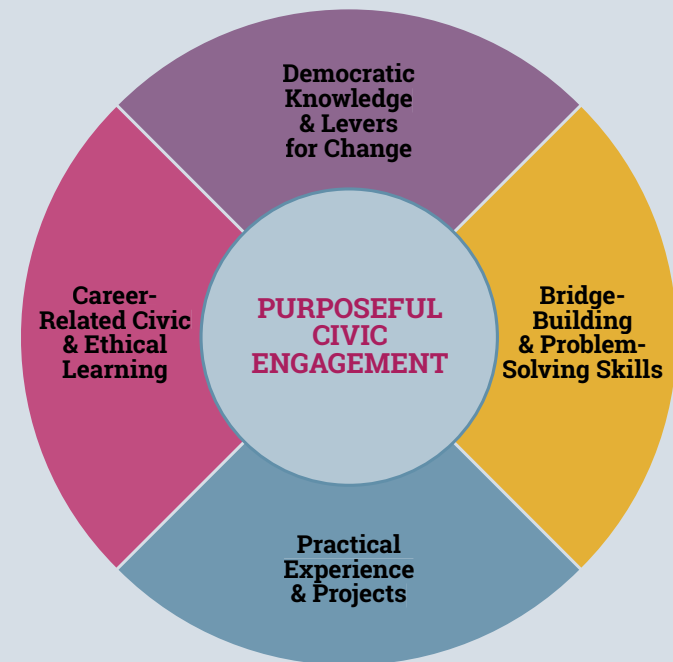
4 The President's Commission on Higher Education. (1947). *Higher education for American democracy: Volume I. Establishing the goals*. The Department of State of the United States of America.

FIGURE 2

What Should Students Gain From Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement in College?

The CLDE Framework highlights the knowledge, skills, ethical lenses, and practical experiences graduates need to understand the world they are part of, consider the implications of different courses of action, determine what problems matter, and build solutions to those problems. (See Figure 3 for details.)

The CLDE Coalition is calling on postsecondary education to make college civic learning and democracy engagement – as outlined in this framework – part of every student's college experience.



The heart of that educational partnership is the college curriculum: the programs and pathways that students complete to earn a college degree. It is time for every postsecondary college and university — community colleges and four year institutions, public and private — to make students' civic learning and democracy engagement an essential part of students' pathways through postsecondary education.

U.S. higher education institutions can work — individually and collectively — to address democracy's current challenges and to engage students in the learning that will prepare them to contribute to democracy's success.



Within the courses that students complete for their degrees, educators can:

- Create opportunities for reasoned and evidence-based discussions, teach the skills needed to work with those who hold differing views, and instill a collaborative approach to problem solving;
- Engage students in core issues related to democracy, freedom, and political systems that support and oppose liberty;
- Require practical experiences designed to prepare students for civic and ethical responsibility both in society and in their careers; and
- Support students' work on public good questions that matter to them and matter to society.

Educators across all parts of postsecondary education already are working to help students engage in every one of these practices. Across U.S. higher education are pockets of inspiring college civic learning. ***Every Student, Every Degree*** draws from this work, urges concerted action to expand and scale it, and points the way forward for both higher education and democracy.

“We cannot be a stratified nation in which some college students prepare for civic leadership while others get the implicit message that democracy will not require either their time or their talent.”

Yolanda Watson Spiva, *President*, Complete College America,
CLDE Coalition Lead Partner

Every Student, Every Degree: The CLDE Framework for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement

COLLEGE CIVIC LEARNING HONES THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NEEDED TO BUILD TOMORROW'S DEMOCRACY

The CLDE Coalition was created in 2021 in response to the serious challenges facing democracy at home and abroad. In active dialogue with civic-committed educators, researchers, community partners, and others across the country, coalition leaders have developed the CLDE Framework to help colleges and universities revitalize their own approaches to college civic learning and democracy engagement.

The CLDE Framework (Figures 2 and 3) is built around one over-arching goal and four key components of college civic learning and democracy engagement.

The over-arching goal is each student's individual development of purposeful civic engagement. From the beginning of college and as they progress, students regularly explore democratic principles as well as their own experiences with democracy. They examine issues they care about and practice productive dialogue with those who disagree. Ultimately, they arrive at their own choices about the role they want to play in a democratic society and about what the future of democracy can be.



“Bridges don’t fall from the sky or rise from the ground. People have to build bridges.”

Eboo Patel, *President*, Interfaith America

To support students' development of purposeful civic engagement, the CLDE Framework includes four intersecting components:

- Democratic knowledge and levers for change;
- Bridge-building and problem-solving skills;
- Practical experience and projects, including collaborative work in real-world settings; and
- Career-related civic and ethical learning.

Figure 3 suggests the kinds of knowledge, skills, and practical experience students should gain across all four of these interconnected areas of civic and democracy learning.



The approach is nonpartisan. Across their studies and practical experiences in community-based problem solving, students should discover that there are many different views of what makes a good society. They also should learn that a core part of small-d democratic responsibility is working across differences to solve problems together. (This report uses the term *small-d democratic* because *democratic* in this context means *relating to the principles of democracy* rather than to a political party.)

An education grounded in the CLDE Framework gives students essential context about democracy, engages students in real-world efforts to address pressing public problems, and builds skills valued by communities and employers. It prepares students to address critical challenges facing their communities, the nation, and the world.

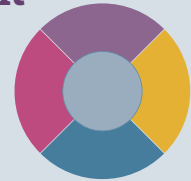
The CLDE Framework is suggestive, not prescriptive. Each educational institution will need to foster civic learning and democracy engagement in ways that work for its mission, students, and communities.

That said, educators across all parts of postsecondary education can use the CLDE Framework as a template to build civic learning and democracy engagement into their own curricula and co-curricula as well as their ongoing partnerships with the wider community. In doing so, they will prepare every postsecondary student for their roles and responsibilities in a self-governing democratic society.

FIGURE 3

The CLDE Framework for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement

Civic learning and democracy engagement addresses content, builds students' skills, and ensures that students gain practical experience. Over time, students reflect on their identities, experiences, societal roles, and civic purpose. They make their own choices about civic engagement and problem solving in both their careers and society. Colleges can and should build each of the framework components into courses and practicums that are required for both certificates and degrees.



DEMOCRATIC KNOWLEDGE & LEVERS FOR CHANGE

Students explore:

- ★ Key democratic principles and debates about meaning and application
- ★ Constitutionalism and the political systems that frame democratic governance
- ★ Founding and freedom texts for the U.S. democratic republic
- ★ Historical and comparative knowledge of U.S. and global freedom movements
- ★ Authoritarianism and other anti-democracy movements
- ★ Civic inquiry and public good questions related to students' careers
- ★ Levers for influencing change in society and specific career fields
- ★ Students' experiences and views of democratic principles and practices

Where? In general education programs and courses that explore democracy's development, principles, contestations, and challenges, including movements for policy and societal change; and in students' majors, including career and technical fields.

BRIDGE-BUILDING & PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Students develop:

- ★ Communication skills: written, oral, and intergroup dialogue
- ★ Critical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning
- ★ Digital, data, and media literacy, including disinformation
- ★ Productive engagement with diverse views and experiences
- ★ Problem solving with diverse partners
- ★ Ethical reasoning about alternative approaches to problems
- ★ Purpose and agency grounded in a strong sense of identity

Where? Practiced across general education and all majors, including career and technical studies, and in co-curricular and community-based experiences and projects.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE & PROJECTS

Students help create new solutions through:

- ★ Individual and group work on public good and justice questions
- ★ Collaborative service learning projects in courses
- ★ Community-based problem solving with diverse partners
- ★ Research projects with and for community or government organizations
- ★ Public presentation and discussion of project results
- ★ Guided reflection on their learning from field-based experience and problem solving

Where? Research and/or action projects completed to meet degree requirements in majors, certificates, and/or general education.

CAREER-RELATED CIVIC & ETHICAL LEARNING

Students work on:

- ★ Public policy and public good issues related to chosen or likely careers
- ★ Levers for influencing policy decisions in their career fields
- ★ Civility, fairness, and collaborative problem solving in work contexts
- ★ Career-related ethical principles and standards for practice
- ★ Civic, ethical, and fairness questions raised through practical problem solving
- ★ Collaborative reflection – with mentors and peers – on civic, ethical, and fairness issues related to careers

Where? In students' major fields, including career and technical studies; in career planning programs, curricular or co-curricular; and in practicums and projects required for a degree or certificate.

STUDENTS' PURPOSEFUL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE

Through their course-taking; practical experiences working on public questions; and guided reflection on their own identities, goals, and civic voice, students will make their own decisions about how they want to contribute to the public good beyond college. Some students may work on public good questions related to their professions and/or workplace. Others may become active in local and/or faith communities. Some will

choose public service as their career. Many will contribute primarily as engaged and knowledgeable voters. Whatever their choices for the future, all students should graduate civic ready, democracy ready, and career ready. And they should be deeply conversant with public good questions directly related to their intended careers.

NOW IS THE TIME: HIGHER EDUCATION SHOULD PRIORITIZE CIVIC LEARNING AND DEMOCRACY ENGAGEMENT

Education and democracy are interdependent.

A free, self-governing society needs participants who are knowledgeable; prepared to make judgments about complex issues; and committed to sticking with small-d democratic ways of solving problems, even under trying circumstances.

For our present-day, pluralist democracy, the bar is even higher. The United States is already the world's most diverse democracy and will soon be a democracy in which no racial or ethnic group predominates. Americans need and deserve an education that engages them with the United States as a pluralist society with far-reaching global influence and that prepares them to work productively across differences of many kinds to create solutions.

Americans need to be ready to assess information critically; discern evidence from disinformation; and contribute to collaborative problem solving with diverse partners, including those with whom they disagree. They need to learn the arts of small-d democratic decision-making.

“We get the government and the country we deserve. Getting the one we need, however, is up to us.”

Richard Haass, *President Emeritus*, Council on Foreign Relations

Higher education, in turn, is founded on freedom, including the freedom to tackle challenging questions; search for the best approaches; and bring rigorous review, rather than ideology or politics, to the expansion of knowledge and to students' college learning. Americans need to learn why this freedom is so important while students need to understand the connections between academic freedom and the quality of their own education.

Engaging in Democracy Is Critical for All Students, Across All Degrees

Engaging in small-d democratic inquiry and problem solving has benefits for both students and the nation (Figure 4). But these skills are learned, just like effective writing and quantitative reasoning.

Educators already know that students need practice across their educational journey to become skilled in writing and math. The same principle applies to democracy.

Learners of all ages must develop and hone the practices that support a fair and inclusive democracy. Learners from all backgrounds need opportunities to reach their own judgments about the kind of democracy they want to live in. And college-level study has a special opportunity to contribute to this work.

Today, the majority of all Americans enroll in higher education, either directly after high school or later, as returning adults.⁵ While deep disparities persist, more than half of U.S. adults between the ages of 24 and 65 have earned a postsecondary degree or credential.⁶

Given the strong correlation between education and civic participation, more students enrolling in college should be an important asset for democracy. But the benefits to democracy are strongest when colleges engage students in active, question-centered civic and small-d democratic learning.

FIGURE 4

Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Benefits Students and the Nation



Benefits to Students

- Higher levels of persistence and completion
- Development of a personal code of ethics and values
- Deeper engagement with issues of justice, freedom, and responsibility
- Deeper understanding of people from other backgrounds
- Better informed choices about civic and justice issues in careers and communities
- Stronger interest in solving public problems across difference
- Stronger collaborative and problem-solving skills
- Increased self-efficacy and sense of belonging

Source: Chittum, J. R., Enke, K. A. E., & Finley, A. P. (2022). *The effects of community-based and civic engagement in higher education*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.



Benefits to the Nation

- Graduates ready to address significant public problems in both careers and society
- Graduates with practical problem-solving skills desired by employers
- Graduates with practical problem-solving skills needed in a diverse democracy
- Graduates more committed to civic action, social responsibility, and justice
- Graduates both prepared and motivated to bridge societal differences
- Higher levels of community service
- Higher levels of engagement with democracy

Source: Valentine, J., Price, D., & Yang, H.; DVP-PRAXIS LTD (2021). *High-impact practices and gains in student learning: Evidence from Georgia, Montana, and Wisconsin*. Lumina Foundation.

5 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). [61.8 percent of recent high school graduates enrolled in college in October 2021](#).

6 Lumina Foundation. (n.d.). [We're tracking America's progress toward the 60% attainment goal](#).

Students Must Explore Their Own Roles in Democracy and Make Their Own Choices for the Future

When educators use the CLDE Framework, students examine and share their own perceptions of democracy across their course of study. For many students, the experience of democracy has been one of freedom, opportunity, and talent development. However, many other students have had troubled and even turbulent experiences in their lives and communities.

Within higher education, belonging is itself an issue, with some students feeling fully at home in higher education and others struggling to find voice, inclusion, and supports for success. Many of today's students are wrestling with core issues of financial aid, housing, food security, child care, mental health, or neighborhood violence. Many care passionately about war and human suffering, the sanctity of human life, and the future of the planet.

Students need to hear one another's differing views and experiences, both of democracy and of the problems they believe democracies

need to tackle. They also should discover that almost any public good question they care about can be explored *through* their college studies.

When democracy-related studies begin in the first semester of college, the questions students raise can help guide their choice of courses and community-based projects, both in their majors and across different disciplines. As students progress through college, they can use their coursework to explore the questions democracies have struggled with in the past, the challenges democracies face in the present, and what it will take to secure a thriving democracy in the future.

Through all of these efforts, students work toward making their own decisions about civic engagement and problem solving in their lives, their work, and democracy. In the words of Laurie Patton, president-elect of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, "That is what makes democracy real." It also is what prepares graduates to solve our nation's current and future challenges.

A growing number of institutions and policy organizations are already making the commitment to involve all students, rather than just some students, in college civic learning. However, while the majority of postsecondary institutions offer civic learning opportunities, few require civic learning for all students, and even fewer integrate it throughout the curriculum.

Colleges can use the CLDE Framework to incorporate civic learning and democracy engagement into every student's

degree plan. Not just one course. Not just a small group of students. Colleges should help every student build their readiness to participate in democracy through both traditional courses and collaborative work in real-world settings.

This approach is consistent with the historical and ongoing mission of U.S. higher education, including preparing students for the future, supporting the public good, and ensuring opportunity for all students. As detailed in Figures 5, 6, and 8, it also boosts students' readiness to succeed in the economy.

Five Reasons to Commit to College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement

The CLDE Framework is not about adding one civics class or creating a small program for a select group of students. It is about rethinking the curricula for all degree programs, so all students gain the critical knowledge, skills, and practical experience they will need for both democracy and their careers.

Including all students in college civic learning will require institution-wide leadership, commitment, and change on multiple levels: in the design of program pathways, requirements, and assignments; in the kind of learning institutions assess; and above all, in broadening the meaning of college success to include civic learning as a value and as a key component in career readiness.

Educators and policy leaders have five powerful incentives for doing this work:

- 1.** Leveraging high-impact practices (HIPs) to generate gains for students and the nation;
- 2.** Preparing students with skills that employers value;
- 3.** Addressing the existential need for engaging across differences;
- 4.** Preparing students to form their own judgments and to identify their roles in shaping their communities and the nation; and
- 5.** Helping to resolve the persistent, unfinished struggle for equal voice, opportunity, and justice.



1. LEVERAGING HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES (HIPs) TO GENERATE GAINS FOR STUDENTS AND THE NATION

Working on civic and public good problems contributes to student success, in part because when students undertake this work, they frequently are participating in civic-minded HIPs, such as service learning and working with community partners on issues that are relevant to students and society.

HIPs are evidence-based practices that are positively associated, across all demographic backgrounds, with a wide variety of student success outcomes, including increases in college persistence and completion. HIPs engage and challenge students because they typically require students to give considerable time and effort to complex, ongoing educational tasks, such as writing, research, and collaborative projects with diverse partners. Through these forms of engaged learning, students connect *knowing* with *doing*.

“Civic learning gives names to the problems that people are facing. Everybody has something that they want to change in either government or politics or just in society, and civic learning teaches you the ways that those problems can be categorized and how you can make those changes.”

Torrance Malone, Class of 2024, Piedmont Virginia Community College

National research shows that participation in civic-related HIPs is correlated with multiple predictors of college completion (Figure 5). Students who have these experiences also leave college with a deeper understanding of people from other backgrounds, and they are more adaptable and have a greater sense of belonging.

Graduates who have experienced civic-minded HIPs gain the practical problem-solving skills that are essential for a diverse, lasting democracy. These graduates are more committed to social responsibility and justice, and they have higher levels of voting and engaging in community service (Figure 5).

The 11 evidence-based HIPs are:

- First-year seminars and experiences;
- Common intellectual experiences;
- Learning communities;
- Writing-intensive courses;
- Collaborative assignments and projects;
- Undergraduate research;
- Diversity and global learning;
- Service learning and community-based learning;
- Internships and practicums;
- e-Portfolios; and
- Capstone courses and projects.⁷

⁷ Kuh, G., O'Donnell, K., & Schneider, C. (2017). HIPs at Ten. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 9(5), 8–16.

FIGURE 5

How College Students Benefit From Civic Learning and Engagement

A synthesis of major research studies shows that students gain many benefits from participating in civic-related high-impact practices (HIPs). When students engage in civic-related HIPs, which combine *knowing* and *doing*, they are more likely to persist in and complete college. They also gain a strong understanding of social issues, improve their academic and problem-solving abilities, and develop skills that employers value.

Outcomes for Students	Summary of Findings from 2022 AAC&U Synthesis of Research on Community-Based and Civic Engagement	
Graduation and retention (11 studies)¹ and other institutional outcomes (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ More likely to graduate ★ Earned more credits ★ More likely to re-enroll 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Institutional implementation of collaborative and participatory pedagogies ★ Students practicing collaborative and mutual learning
Mindsets and dispositions (17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Increased openness to and understanding of diversity ★ Increased awareness of social issues and social justice ★ Increased adaptability ★ Positive self-perceptions of socially responsible leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ More positive attitude toward school and enjoyment of challenging tasks ★ Increased self-efficacy and sense of belonging
Personal and social responsibility (28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Increased civic attitudes and civic mindedness ★ Increased civic and community-based engagement (desire/goals, behaviors during and after college, perceived value) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Civic learning ★ Perceived civic and social responsibility ★ Moral and ethical reasoning and actions
Intellectual and practical skills (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Improved interpersonal skills: communication, collaboration, and teamwork ★ Increased problem-solving and critical thinking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Increased academic content learning and skills such as research, writing, and mathematical analysis
Career preparation (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Better career exploration skills ★ Increased career exploration in a field related to public service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Increased career-related knowledge and skills
Learning gains (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Improved grades and grade point average (GPA) ★ Improved test performance and assignment scores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Self-reported general learning gains
Findings for underserved students² (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Most consistently discussed in terms of race effects across student populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Tend to focus on a small set of outcomes, such as cumulative GPA, retention rates, credits earned, and graduation rates

¹Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of publications with findings related to each outcome category. The total number of publications exceeds the sample size because many studies included multiple outcomes of focus. ²Where applicable, studies examining effects for underserved students are also included in each of the other outcome categories.

Source: Chittum, J. R., Enke, K. A. E., & Finley, A. P. (2022). [The effects of community-based and civic engagement in higher education](#). American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Service learning is the HIP most often used to engage students in civic learning, and it leads to dramatic gains in both academic and practical learning (Figure 6), but too few students experience it (Figure 7).

However, every HIP can include civic topics and small-d democratic practices, such as engaging diverse views, listening respectfully, and seeking points of agreement. Every HIP can engage students in evaluating alternative

approaches to problems. And every HIP can involve students in ethical reflection and considering the public consequences of different choices.

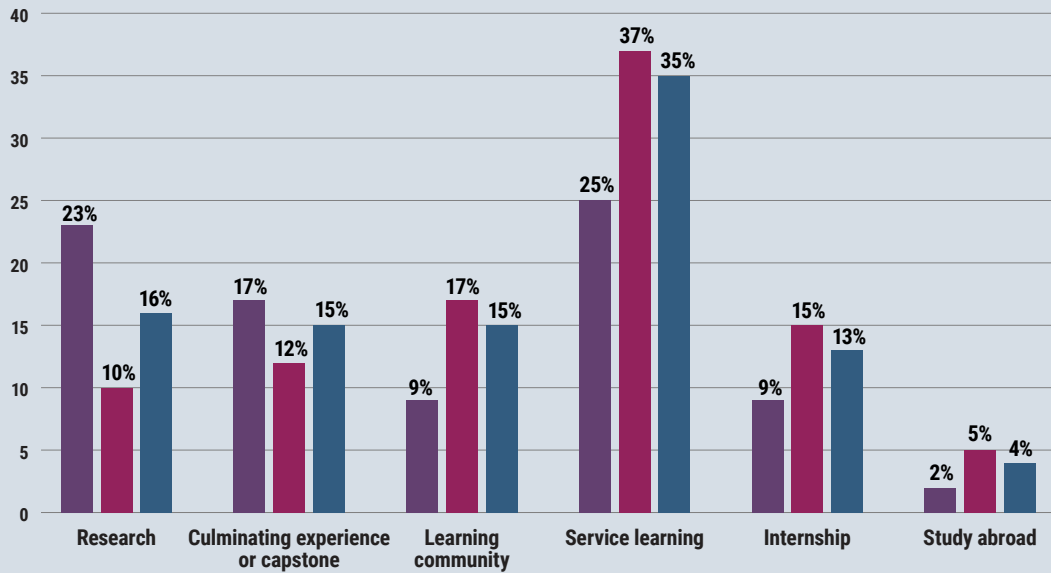
Rather than view civic learning as a separate initiative, educators who are already working to expand students' participation in HIPs should explore ways to make civic inquiry and reflection an integral part of every HIP they require or recommend.

FIGURE 6

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) – Particularly Service Learning – Boost Academic and Practical Skills

Students' participation in HIPs results in significant gains in both academic and practical skills. Students get the most dramatic boost when they take courses that include a community-based project (service learning).

Service Learning Provides Academic and Practical Learning Gains



Academic learning gains include:

- Writing clearly and effectively;
- Speaking clearly and effectively;
- Thinking critically and analytically; and
- Analyzing numerical and statistical information.

Practical learning gains include:

- Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills;
- Working effectively with others;
- Developing/clarifying a personal code of values and ethics;
- Understanding people of other backgrounds;
- Solving complex real-world problems; and
- Being an informed and active citizen.

Overall learning gains are the combination of academic and practical learning gains.

Source: Valentine, J., Price, D., & Yang, H.; DVP-PRAXIS LTD (2021). *High-impact practices and gains in student learning: Evidence from Georgia, Montana, and Wisconsin*. Lumina Foundation.

FIGURE 7

Far Too Few Students Experience Community-Based Learning

Every year, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) asks community college students about their college experience, and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects data from four-year students.

Both CCSSE and NSSE ask students whether their courses included a “community-based project (service learning).” Their findings reveal

a civic learning shortfall across all of higher education.

More than three-quarters of community college students report never participating in a community-based project. At four-year institutions, 48 percent of first-year students and 41 percent of seniors say they did not engage in any course that included this practice.

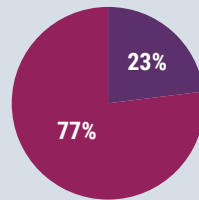
One solution to this civic learning shortfall is to embed civic and ethical topics and assignments in all high-impact practices (HIPs) – such as first-year seminars, writing courses, internships and practicums, research, and capstones – so that opportunities for civic learning and democracy engagement are expanded across the curriculum.

Almost Eight in 10 Community College Students Never Experience Service Learning

Community college students:
In your experiences at this college during the current academic year, about how often have you done the following?

- Never
- Sometimes, Often, or Very Often

Participated in a community-based project (service-learning activity) as part of a regular course



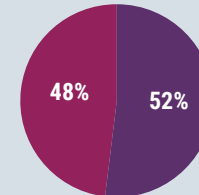
Source: Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2021 Cohort data.

Four in 10 Four-Year Students Never Experience Service Learning

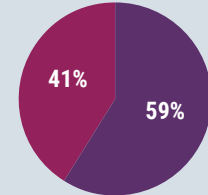
Four-year college students:
About how many of your courses at this institution have included a community-based project (service learning)?

- None
- All, Most, or Some

First-year students



Seniors



Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, 2023 data.

“If not us, then who? If not now, then when? Are we going to continue to sleepwalk into the unthinkable? Or are we actually going to strive to make a difference?”

Spencer Cox, Governor, State of Utah, and founder of the National Governors Association initiative *Disagree Better*

2. PREPARING STUDENTS WITH SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS VALUE

Educators do not have to choose between civic learning and career studies. In fact, career learning and the skills outlined in the CLDE Framework go hand in hand. Students who participate in civic-related high-impact practices (HIPs) make notable gains in a broad set of skills that employers consider very important, including oral and written communication, collaboration and teamwork, problem solving, and working with people from different backgrounds (Figures 5 and 6).⁸

Employers also report that they are much more likely to consider job candidates who participated in HIPs. Employers further encourage a suite of other practices that are emphasized in both the CLDE Framework and in a liberal education, such as encouragement to think for oneself and broad multi-disciplinary learning (Figure 8).

The CLDE Framework, moreover, recommends civic inquiry and projects directly related to students' career exploration. This approach helps students better understand their roles and ethical responsibilities as professionals, connect their public good interests to their chosen careers, and prepare for future employment.

Thus, colleges that build civic learning into the curriculum are building on the natural connections among civic learning, student success, and career readiness. They are ensuring that their students will be prepared for a variety of employment opportunities and for civic engagement. As a result, our nation will have the workforce it needs for a flourishing economy — and the population it needs for an engaged and thriving democracy.



“We must bring democracy into every major. When we teach engineering students to build a bridge, we should ask them ... Who are you trying to serve? What are the larger implications of this project? Regardless of the major, every discipline has to operate in a larger context in order to address society’s problems.”

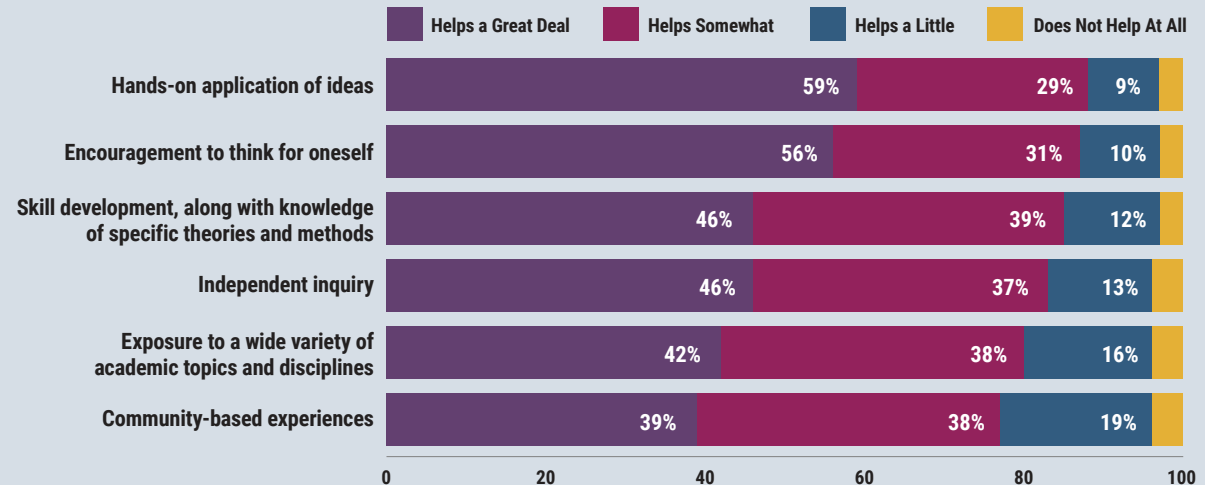
Alison Rios Millet McCartney,
Professor of Political Science, Towson University

⁸ Finley, A. P. (2023). *The career-ready graduate: What employers say about the difference college makes*. American Association of Colleges and Universities; Morning Consult. Page 13.

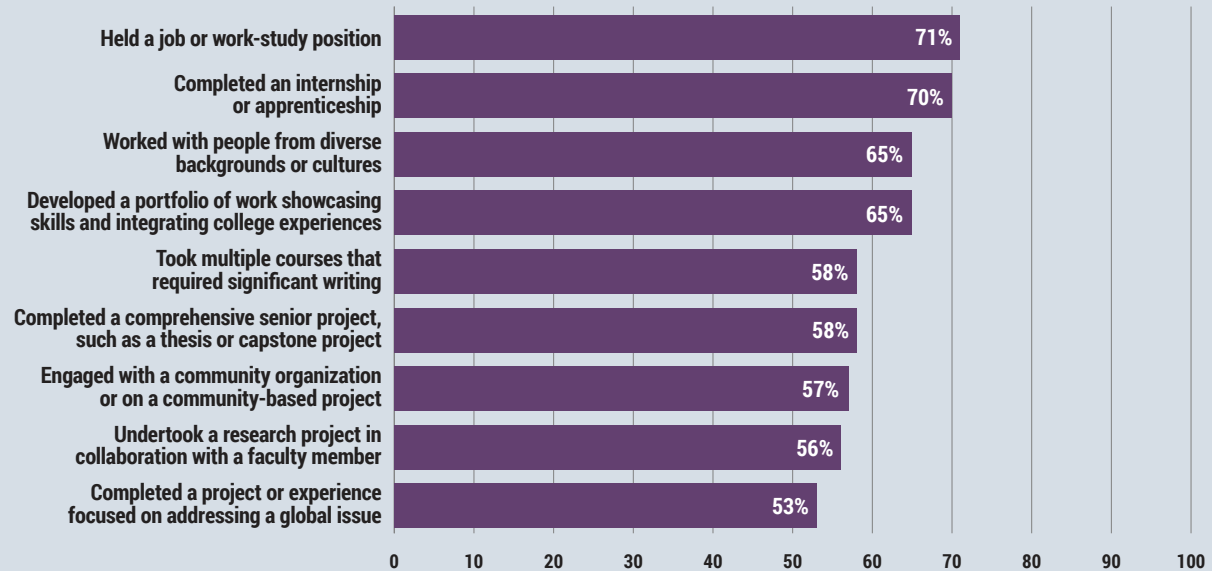
FIGURE 8

Employers Value the Skills That Active College Civic Learning Can Provide

Educational experiences that help college graduates to succeed in the workforce, according to employers



Percentage of employers who indicated they would be much more likely to consider a job candidate who participated in specific high-impact practices (HIPs)



Source: Finley, A. P. (2023). *The career-ready graduate: What employers say about the difference college makes*. American Association of Colleges and Universities; Morning Consult.

3. ADDRESSING THE EXISTENTIAL NEED FOR ENGAGING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

The National Governors Association has declared that Americans need to “disagree better.”⁹ In the same spirit, leaders from both sides of the political spectrum are calling

on higher education to do a better job of preparing students to engage productively across challenging differences.

The college curriculum has a central role to play in this work. Students must learn to acknowledge that disagreement is inevitable in a pluralist society – and they should actively

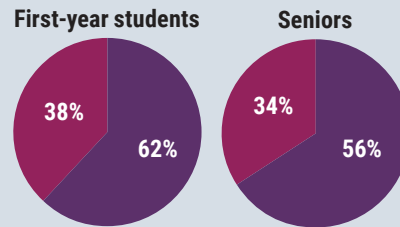
FIGURE 9

Postsecondary Institutions Must Help Many More Students Engage With People Who Differ From Them

A Third of Four-Year Students Say Their Institutions Did Not Substantially Help Them Understand People With Other Backgrounds

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your understanding of people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)?

Very Little or Some Quite a Bit or Very Much

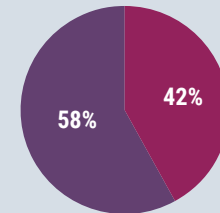


Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, 2023 data.

Almost Half of Community College Students Never Have Serious Conversations With Students Who Differ From Them

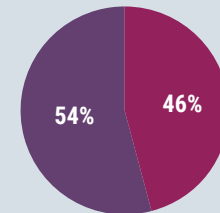
How much does this college emphasize encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?

Very Little or Some Quite a Bit or Very Much



In your experience at this college during the current academic year, about how often have you had serious conversations with students who differ from you?

Never Sometimes, Often, or Very Often



Source: Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2021 Cohort data.

9 National Governors Association. (n.d.). *Disagree better*.

practice the skills of interacting and discussing issues with people who have different backgrounds, views, and priorities.

After all, at its core, higher education is about thoughtfully engaging with ideas. The CLDE Framework (Figures 2 and 3) invites students to engage with ideas that are central to this time and the country. Critical thinking and working with a diverse group of people to make decisions and solve problems may be the most essential skills students can learn at college.

Both research evidence and headline news show that many students need far better preparation in engaging across

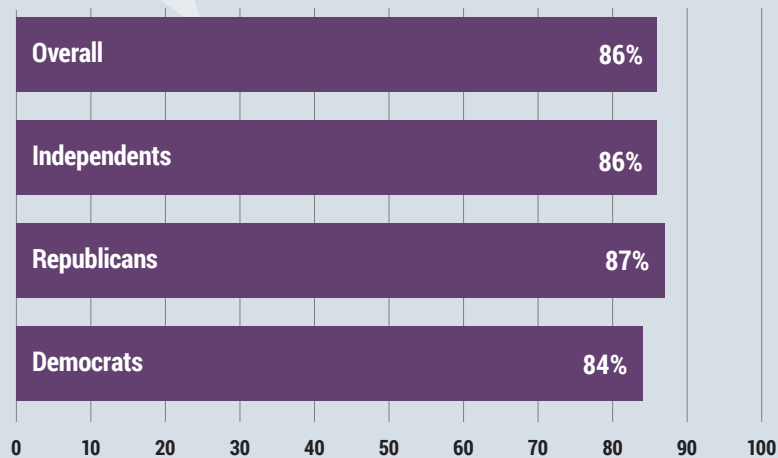
difficult differences than most now receive. Moral suasion will not be enough. Students need active and ongoing practice.

Despite the campus diversity in which higher education collectively takes pride, many students do not experience interactions with students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Figure 9). Every institution taking a fresh look at its approach to civic learning and democracy engagement should study its own evidence on these issues and identify places within its degree requirements to address them.

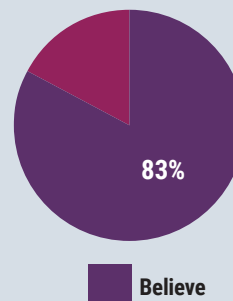
FIGURE 10

Broad, Bipartisan Majorities Agree: Colleges Should Expose Students to Controversial Topics and a Wide Range of Viewpoints

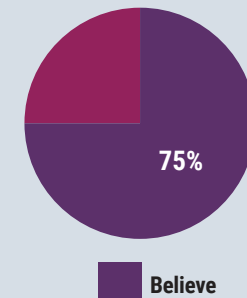
College students should be exposed to multiple points of view



Weighing multiple points of view about a controversial topic helps students learn to think critically



Becoming an adult involves being able to handle considering different ideas, even if they are uncomfortable



Source: American Council on Education. (2022). *ACE public opinion research by The Winston Group: Voters' perceptions of higher education related to speech and viewpoint diversity across campus and in the classroom.*

4. PREPARING STUDENTS TO FORM THEIR OWN JUDGMENTS AND TO IDENTIFY THEIR ROLES IN SHAPING THEIR COMMUNITIES AND THE NATION

If colleges want students to think for themselves, they must provide ample opportunities for students to develop the skills — and the habit — of doing so. Every student also must develop the ability to evaluate information critically so they can determine what sources they will use to shape their worldview.

Developing critical judgment includes being exposed to a broad range of ideas and experiences; learning to evaluate the relative merits of each idea, argument, or data set; and having opportunities to review and discuss those ideas with others.

Fortunately, there is broad agreement among the public that college should prepare students to explore complex topics even if those topics may be uncomfortable. In fall 2022, the American Council on Education (ACE) surveyed 1,000 registered voters, including Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated voters (independents). Bipartisan majorities say that all topics should be open for discussion on college campuses, as long as issues are fairly presented (Figure 10).¹⁰

In addition, Americans value college because it encourages people to develop their own ideas and exposes people to different viewpoints (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11

Americans Value College for Encouraging People to Develop Their Own Ideas and Hear Different Viewpoints

When I think about how college makes a valuable contribution to someone's quality of life, it is because ...

A college education encourages people to develop their own ideas



When I think how college can be valuable for a healthy democracy, it is because ...

A college education exposes people to different viewpoints



Strongly Agree Somewhat Agree Don't Know/No Opinion Somewhat Disagree Strongly Disagree

Source: Liberal Education. (Spring 2023). *The ways Americans value higher ed*. Liberal Education 109, no. 2, 12–13.

10 American Council on Education. (n.d.). *ACE public opinion research: Voters' perceptions of higher education related to speech and viewpoint diversity across campus and in the classroom*.

5. HELPING TO RESOLVE THE PERSISTENT, UNFINISHED STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL VOICE, OPPORTUNITY, AND JUSTICE

Engaging in democracy means understanding its principles and aspirations as well as its contested history and the still unfinished struggles — in the United States and worldwide — for equal voice, opportunity, and justice.

Ensuring that everyone can participate in democracy is central to democracy itself. And this principle is core to civic learning and democracy engagement. Therefore, college educators committed to this work should focus on three points:

1. Students' experiences shape their views of democracy, including how effective the system currently is, how it should evolve in the future, and what their role in it could be. On every campus, students have widely differing experiences of democracy and will hold differing views about how — or whether — it should evolve.
2. Educators must recognize these differences and act to ensure that all students' views are heard, both in the curriculum and in co-curricular contexts. Diverse perspectives among today's students are one of democracy's most vital assets. A college education should help students learn how to engage that diversity and how it can help them prepare to navigate a pluralist world.

3. Dialogues across difference can be difficult for students as well as the faculty and staff who teach them. Institutions committed to the goals of bridge building and problem solving with diverse partners will invest in preparing faculty, staff, and administrators to guide challenging conversations. Professional learning will help develop confidence and skill in navigating hard questions and the strong feelings they may elicit.

Putting these ideas into action should include a sharper focus on who has the opportunity to speak, who is involved in making decisions, and how various voices are received.

Higher education leaders are already reviewing their guidelines for ensuring free expression while also protecting their educational missions and student safety. But strengthening campus rules regarding conflict is only part of the work education leaders need to accomplish.



As the Bipartisan Policy Center task force has written, higher education needs to help its graduates become independent thinkers who also are ready to engage “contrary viewpoints and work constructively with those with whom they may have principled disagreements.”¹¹

Taking action also should include addressing attempts to suppress important questions with which Americans need to wrestle. For example, in 2021, four organizations – the American Association of University Professors, the American Historical Association, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and PEN America – authored a joint statement opposing legislation that restricts discussion of the role of racism in U.S. history.¹² More than 150 other educational organizations co-signed the statement.

The organizations wrote the letter in response to legislative initiatives in many states that prohibit or impede teaching “what are termed ‘divisive concepts.’” The letter says, “These legislative efforts seek to substitute political mandates for the considered judgment of professional educators, hindering students’ ability to learn and engage in critical thinking across differences and disagreements.” And it notes that all Americans need “a free and open exchange about history and the forces that shape our world today.”¹³

Where restrictive laws have passed, faculty are discouraged or even prohibited from exploring specific topics in their classrooms.¹⁴ This limiting of free inquiry and analysis constrains learning and undermines the very purpose of a college community. Educational leaders must act to protect – and encourage – the asking of challenging questions and the free exchange of ideas, particularly among those who disagree.

“The antithesis of liberal education is not conservative education but illiberal education – indoctrination, rote and purely instrumental learning, unquestioned transmission of a closed system of thought.”

American Association of Colleges and Universities, *What Liberal Education Looks Like*

11 Bipartisan Policy Center. (2021). [Campus free expression: A new roadmap](#).

12 American Historical Association. (2021). [Joint statement on legislative efforts to restrict education about racism in American history \(June 2021\)](#).

13 Ibid.

14 PEN America maintains an [index of legislation and executive orders](#) related to divisive concepts.

Full Speed Ahead: Civic-Minded Educators and Policy Organizations Are Leading the Way

The CLDE Coalition was created in 2021 by higher education and policy organizations. Since its founding, the coalition has worked with both educators and policy influencers on ways to help higher education include all students, rather than just some students, in college civic learning and democracy engagement.

The good news for interested higher education leaders is that many two- and four-year institutions have already taken action to include civic learning in their degree requirements. The CLDE Coalition calls these trail-blazers *Full-Participation Institutions*.

Collectively, these institutions show that full participation is feasible, that civic learning and democracy engagement can be tailored to the needs and lives of today's diverse college students, and that this work aligns with different institutional missions.

The challenge now is to make full participation a shared goal for all community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. When all postsecondary students participate in civic learning — Every Student, Every Degree — all graduates can play positive and constructive roles in democracy.

In addition to progress at individual institutions, highly influential policy organizations have begun working actively to encourage the spread of college civic learning and democracy engagement for all postsecondary students. Joining forces with educational organizations that have been working on college civic learning for decades, all of the institutional accrediting commissions and a growing number of state systems today are bringing new momentum to both higher education's civic mission and the inclusion of democracy in college-level civic learning.



FULL-PARTICIPATION INSTITUTIONS SHOW HOW TO INCLUDE ALL STUDENTS IN CIVIC LEARNING

Full-Participation Institutions are leading the way in scaling college civic learning by including it as a degree requirement. These institutions showcase a range of institutional missions and approaches that engage all college students in civic learning and democracy engagement goals.

Allegany College of Maryland, a rural community college, is deeply committed to serving the community and democracy. Personal and civic responsibility are embedded in the curriculum through the college's [general education learning outcomes](#) and [Educational Master Plan](#). Students have opportunities to learn about and practice democracy through engagement with the community, often centered on career opportunities. These deep experiences contribute to student success while building civic networks, awareness, agency, and engagement.

“America is at a crossroads, and its democratic institutions are at risk. This is the next frontier for higher education. To secure our democracy’s future, higher education must double down on its commitment to preparing all students for leadership and full engagement in the life of our country.”

Raj Vinnakota, *President*, Institute for Citizens and Scholars

When **Arizona State University** (ASU) revamped its [general studies program](#), it added a Governance and Civic Engagement requirement to teach students to collaborate in the presence of dissenting opinions, develop the skills of civic communication, and emphasize the importance of taking an active role in addressing society’s most pressing questions. Guided by the [ASU Charter](#), faculty from across the institution participated in the design of new requirements that focus on interdisciplinary approaches to collaborative problem solving. Other required general education courses related to democracy and civic engagement include American Institutions; Global Communities, Societies, and Individuals; and Sustainability.

Augsburg University’s [Core Curriculum](#) is designed to prepare students to be “effective, informed, and ethical citizens in the 21st century.” Engaging Minneapolis, a course-based element of the core’s Signature Curriculum, includes substantive field experiences that connect issues in the Twin Cities to the course topic. The focus on off-campus, real-world experience continues in the [Augsburg Experience](#), an experiential learning requirement that is often fulfilled through community or civic engagement efforts. The Senior Keystone course provides an opportunity to integrate the themes of “vocation and the search for meaning in a diverse and challenging world.”

Every **Hendrix College** student takes part in an [interdisciplinary first-year seminar](#) that focuses on what it means to be an engaged citizen while exploring a topic from multiple approaches. Civic learning continues throughout the student’s undergraduate experience both in

the [curriculum](#) and as an aspect of [The Odyssey Program](#), Hendrix's signature engaged learning program. Students complete at least three Odyssey experiences, which can be self-designed, co-curricular, or course based. Odyssey experiences are based on high-impact practices (HIPs), such as global learning, service learning, internships, and undergraduate research.

Civic engagement is a central element of **James Madison University's** (JMU) goal of becoming a national model for campus engagement. The [Madison Center for Civic Engagement](#) plays a large role in that vision. The Madison Center's undergraduate Democracy Fellows lead voter engagement efforts campus-wide and in the community. All first-year and new transfer students receive training and practice in having productive conversations across divides through the Madison Center's [Better Conversations Together program](#). [The Human Community](#) aspires to create informed global citizens of the 21st century, emphasizing knowledge, skills, and values that embrace the common good. JMU's [Assessment Day](#) collects university-wide data on civic engagement activities from every student.

“Democracy is hard work. It's supposed to be. It's the work of continually remaking our nation. Our job at the USM is to make this hard work easier – to educate students for civic life, engage them in their communities, and secure our American democracy for generations to come.”

Jay Perman, *Chancellor*, University System of Maryland (USM)

Kingsborough Community College (KCC) fosters civic awareness while giving students the skills they need to actively participate in their communities. [All students are required to have at least one civic engagement experience before graduating](#). This requirement can be satisfied through coursework or an approved non-course-related experience, and the common assessment measure for these experiences is a reflective assignment. The college has defined three domains of civic engagement (civic knowledge, political knowledge, and social responsibility), and reflective assignments are assessed using a rubric based on these domains. KCC was one of 10 finalists for the 2023 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. This is the third time the Aspen Institute has named KCC as a finalist for the prize, which honors outstanding community colleges.

When **The Ohio State University** began creating a [university-wide general education curriculum](#), education for citizenship was selected as its throughline. The theme was selected for its connection to the university's mission and history as a land-grant institution as well as to support the program's goal of developing emotional, social, and professional abilities. The throughline has resonated across disciplines and allowed the theme to span the curriculum. The curriculum is currently being implemented and features an interdisciplinary first-year launch seminar and a final-year reflection seminar. The bookend seminars are designed to foster civic skills, including information literacy, leadership, and intercultural competency.

Shocked by the events at the 2017 Unite the Right Rally and inspired by the community's desire to respond, **Piedmont Virginia Community College** addressed the topic of civic engagement through the accreditation process. It produced the 2019 Quality Enhancement Plan [*Civic Sense: Engaging Students in the Civic Life of Their Communities*](#). Changes included enriching [civic engagement opportunities throughout the co-curriculum](#) and adding a substantial assignment focused on civic engagement in every major.

Salt Lake Community College's general education learning outcomes include developing civic literacy and the capacity to be community-engaged learners who act in mutually beneficial ways with community partners. The requirement is assessed through a required e-portfolio. Institutional support is provided for faculty who want to offer a [designated community-engaged course](#); departments can also be designated as community engaged.

“They’re bringing people into our classroom setting that work directly in our communities ... addressing a lot of the things that I was facing, like gentrification, gang violence, and poverty. College was the first time I opened my lens up to look at the world in a different way. I want to be able to obtain my degree to go back and help my community every way I can.”

Ronny Batista, *Class of 2018*, Metro College Success Program, San Francisco State University; *Graduate Student*, San Francisco State University

The [Metro College Success Program](#) at **San Francisco State University** leverages civic learning and engagement as a cornerstone of its student success strategy. Students in the Metro program follow a career-themed general education pathway within a cohort model for their first two years so they are part of a supportive academic community. A drop-in center staffed by peer mentors supports students in navigating bureaucratic barriers so they are more likely to persist. In upper-division GE courses, such as the SF Living Lab, students critically analyze social justice issues within the context of the Bay Area's political economy. This comprehensive curricular and holistic approach to student success empowers students to view themselves as both local and global citizens, as well as professional workers equipped to advance social good in their communities and future careers. The Metro program supports its faculty through a [learning community](#) focused on providing engaging, top-quality instruction on a large scale. The Metro program has successfully [eliminated the gap in graduation rates](#) for its historically underrepresented students compared to a matched comparison group and their more advantaged peers.

Grounded in the college's Catholic, Jesuit values, the [core curriculum](#) at **Santa Clara University** is designed to educate students for interdisciplinary understanding and ethically informed participation in civic life. Learning goals for the core curriculum include civic life, social justice, and civic engagement. Students are also required to take an [Experiential Learning for Social Justice](#) course. This course includes community-based learning, which connects academic work with the wider community.

Southern Methodist University has a [Civics and Individual Ethics Proficiency and Experience](#) graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. This requirement reflects the university's conclusion that students must be able to identify their own ethical convictions, think self-critically about them, and reflect on their merits. The university has established [rubrics](#) to assess whether students "demonstrate an ability to engage in ethical reasoning about civic and individual life."

The [Civic, Liberal, and Global Education \(COLLEGE\) requirement](#) at **Stanford University** is a first-year, three-course sequence offering students a shared intellectual experience through small seminars based on a shared syllabus. The COLLEGE requirement was unanimously approved by the faculty senate in May 2020. The second course in the sequence, [Citizenship in the 21st Century](#), addresses the history and future of citizenship. The course was designed to delve into complex and compelling topics and be taught by faculty and scholars from across the university. The seminar format also provides students with opportunities to learn and practice the conversational skills that make civil discourse possible.

"A beautiful thing about community-based change is that it's just a lot of people doing little things, and that has ripple effects that are incredibly powerful."

Samantha Palermo, *Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellow*;
Class of 2024, Dartmouth College

Worcester Polytechnic Institute, a private, technology- and science-focused university, is a global leader in project-based learning. [Collaborative, interdisciplinary, community-based projects are featured throughout the curriculum](#), creating a first-to-final-year pathway for civic learning experiences. Robust engagement with local and global partners allows students to see the connections among the collaboration and communication skills they are developing, the STEM careers they hope to build, and their ability to contribute to society.



INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITING COMMISSIONS ARE ACTING TO PROMOTE COLLEGE CIVIC LEARNING AND DEMOCRACY ENGAGEMENT

Each of the nation's major institutional accrediting commissions has signed the CLDE Coalition's [Shared Commitments Statement](#) declaring that "democracy learning is a top priority for higher education." Each also is partnering with the CLDE Coalition to explore ways to use the accreditation process to accelerate civic learning and democracy engagement among all types of postsecondary institutions across the United States.

Two of the nation's seven institutional accreditors, the Higher Learning Commission and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, already have incorporated civic learning and engagement into their quality standards. Together, these commissions reach more than 1,000 two- and four-year colleges and universities. A third, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, issued a position statement "committing to the common good," which endorses "the importance of higher education's mission to educate students for informed, engaged citizenship." The Middle States Commission on Higher Education has mapped the ways in which its quality standards connect to components of the CLDE Framework outlined in Figure 3.

All the commissions now are working with the CLDE Coalition to include civic learning in their meetings and member communications and to highlight institutions that have already made civic learning part of their institutional ethos and degree requirements. The accrediting commissions also are exploring ways to emphasize civic learning and engagement as a theme in their self-study practices for reaccreditation.

"ACCJC's recently released 2024 accreditation standards make 'civic responsibility and the ability to engage with diverse perspectives' essential components of what 'student success' should include, both for our students and for the diverse democracy in which they live and work."

Mac Powell, *President*, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

THE MULTI-STATE COLLABORATIVE IS WORKING ACROSS POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TO ADVANCE CIVIC LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

The Multi-State Collaborative for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (MSC) was formed in 2023, in concert with the CLDE Coalition, to promote robust state-level policies and programs that accelerate institution-level civic learning across all public education institutions. It is organized through a partnership between the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and the National Association of System Heads (NASH) and works in ongoing collaboration with the CLDE Coalition.

MSC state systems aim to make civic learning part of all students' degree plans, and each state system is developing strategies for meeting that goal. The MSC is building on work that was already underway in several states, and it is enlisting leaders and faculty from Full-Participation Institutions as partners in its work.

The MSC now includes a growing number of state systems, each with statewide, campus-based civic and democracy learning leadership groups. Each state system contributes to the MSC's collective exploration of issues such as inclusion and student success; the expansion of community college participation; alignment with K–12 civic learning reforms; and leadership, faculty, and staff development.

Examples of MSC system and state initiatives include:

- **Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE).** The CPE coordinates change and improvement in the state's postsecondary education system. In response to research saying three in four employers have a hard time finding recent college graduates with the skills needed for workplace success, the CPE worked with educators and workforce professionals to identify 10 Essential Skills that make up the [Kentucky Graduate Profile](#). One of the essential skills is “[e]ngage in civic life to improve society,” with this definition: “Graduate will, throughout their college careers, learn from opportunities to engage in political, social and other activities to address issues that benefit society.” Teams from Kentucky's eight four-year public institutions and 16 community and technical colleges now are working collaboratively to embed all 10 Essential Skills in each degree and certificate program and identify ways of showing that students have achieved them.
- **State of Maryland, a founding member of the MSC.** Maryland has an active, collaborative network — including both policy leadership and grassroots, practitioner-led organizations — that works in support of education fostering civic learning and civic responsibility. The University System of Maryland (USM) has made civic learning a strategic priority and is working to infuse civic education for the greater good into curricula across the system. System institutions are encouraged to participate in national initiatives, including the [Carnegie Foundation Elective Classification for Community Engagement](#). The USM recently created a new Civic Learning and Community Engagement Council that

will report regularly to the Board of Regents. The USM also works collaboratively with partners in local school systems to connect civic learning across P–20. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), which has regulatory authority over both public and private two-year and four-year higher education institutions, sees civic education and community engagement as foundational learning outcomes for all public and private higher education institutions. It has charged the higher education community to foster “intellectual and personal development [so students] become contributors in their local and global communities.” In addition, MHEC is working closely with Maryland’s new [Department of Service and Civic Innovation](#), which is charged with broadening civic engagement through community service.

- **The Universities of Wisconsin (UW) Board of Regents.** The Board of Regents included “[f]oster civic engagement and serve the public good” as a strategic objective in its [2023–28 strategic plan](#). The objective commits the UW System to “champion the democratic principles of free expression, academic freedom, and civil discourse.” In advancing this work, system leadership has made clear that civil dialogue is not only vital to citizenship but also foundational for learning. Universities require a climate of open inquiry to develop critical thinking skills and disseminate knowledge that contributes to innovation and a better understanding of the human condition. The Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue (WICCD) was created to advance this work. WICCD will provide resources, opportunities, and support for teaching, learning, and practicing viewpoint diversity, freedom of expression, academic freedom, civil dialogue, and civic participation within UW and its communities.

The institutional and policy influencer examples highlighted in this section showcase only a fraction of the growing MSC efforts to make college civic learning and democracy engagement a new norm for U.S. higher education.

[Learn more](#) and get a fuller portrait of how members of the MSC are working to significantly expand college civic learning and democracy engagement.

“We are strongest as a nation when we teach the skills that lead to arguments informed by nuance, disagreements conducted respectfully, and questioning that probes not only our opponents’ assumptions but our own as well.”

John B. King, *Chancellor*, State University of New York (SUNY),
Former U.S. Secretary of Education

Next Steps: From Partial Participation to CLDE Pathways for All

For years, scholars have warned Americans that democracy cannot be taken for granted and that every American needs intentional preparation — across K–12 and college — to help ensure democracy’s future. But with economic concerns seemingly more urgent, educators and policy leaders in recent decades have largely regarded democracy as a given while turning their attention to financing expanded access, improving college graduation rates, and strengthening college-to-career connections.

Today, there is growing recognition — across the entirety of postsecondary education — that these goals, important as they are, cannot be the sole educational priorities for the world’s most influential democracy.

Once again, as in earlier difficult eras in U.S. and world history, democracy needs repair and renewal. Everyone has a stake in this work, and everyone will be affected by the results. America’s success will have reverberations across the globe.

Even as new civic learning champions come to the table, however, many still are exploring what college education for democracy should mean. Some believe that the top goal is to add a single course on U.S. history and government to the required college curriculum. A growing number of states have already passed some version of that additional required course.

The CLDE Coalition, however, views guided pathway design as a more fruitful approach.

Informed by decades of work with campus educators by AAC&U, the Bonner Foundation, Campus Compact, and other organizations, the CLDE Framework calls for civic inquiry and community-based learning across the curriculum, with meaningful attention to civic, ethical, and public good questions related to students’ career interests and majors.



TWO SAMPLE GUIDED PATHWAYS BASED ON THE CLDE FRAMEWORK

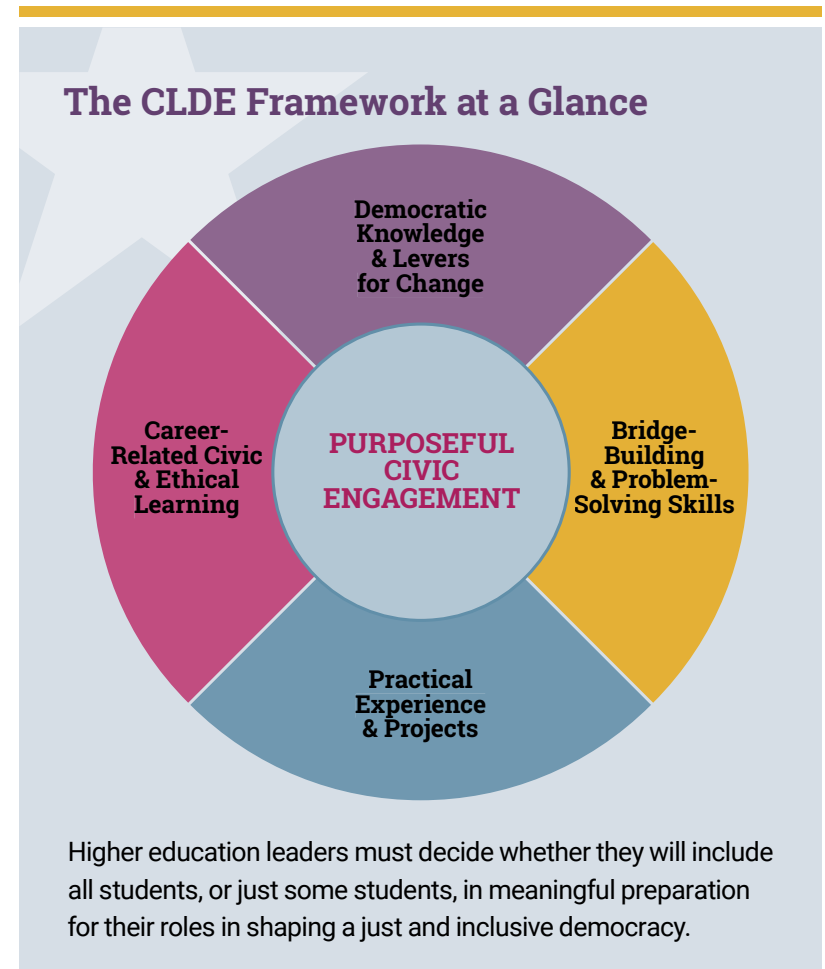
The call to undertake CLDE pathway design means different things in different institutional contexts. The challenge will be for each institution to develop an approach that will work for its students, inspiring their interests, connecting with their lived experiences, and building civic motivation and democracy engagement over time.

Pages 35 and 36 show two sample guided pathways — one for community colleges and one for four-year institutions. Each shows how the CLDE Framework’s vision for contemporary civic learning can be woven into college students’ differing college programs.

The community college pathway shows ways of embedding civic and democracy-related learning in career-related programs and for students completing a shorter-term certificate. The four-year pathway shows how general education and majors can work together, across all four years, to build students’ readiness to work on public good problems both in civil society and in their careers.

Both show how high-impact practices (HIPs) can play a central role in helping students wrestle with complex questions and gain practical skills in working on public good problems with others.

When colleges and universities design pathways using the CLDE Framework, they weave CLDE principles into both general education and major requirements. As a result, students focus deeply on civic inquiry, ethical inquiry, diversity, freedom, and democracy throughout their educational experience. They also develop the problem-solving skills that are essential for participating in a democratic society and adapting to a changing workplace.



Every Student, Every Degree, Every Certificate Sample Community College Guided Pathway Using the CLDE Framework






Community college students frequently choose programs that are closely related to careers, including associate degree programs and shorter certificate programs that meet workforce needs. This pathway provides flexible guidelines for threading civic and democracy learning into both two-year associate degrees (typically 60 credit hours) and certificate programs (typically 24–30 credit hours).

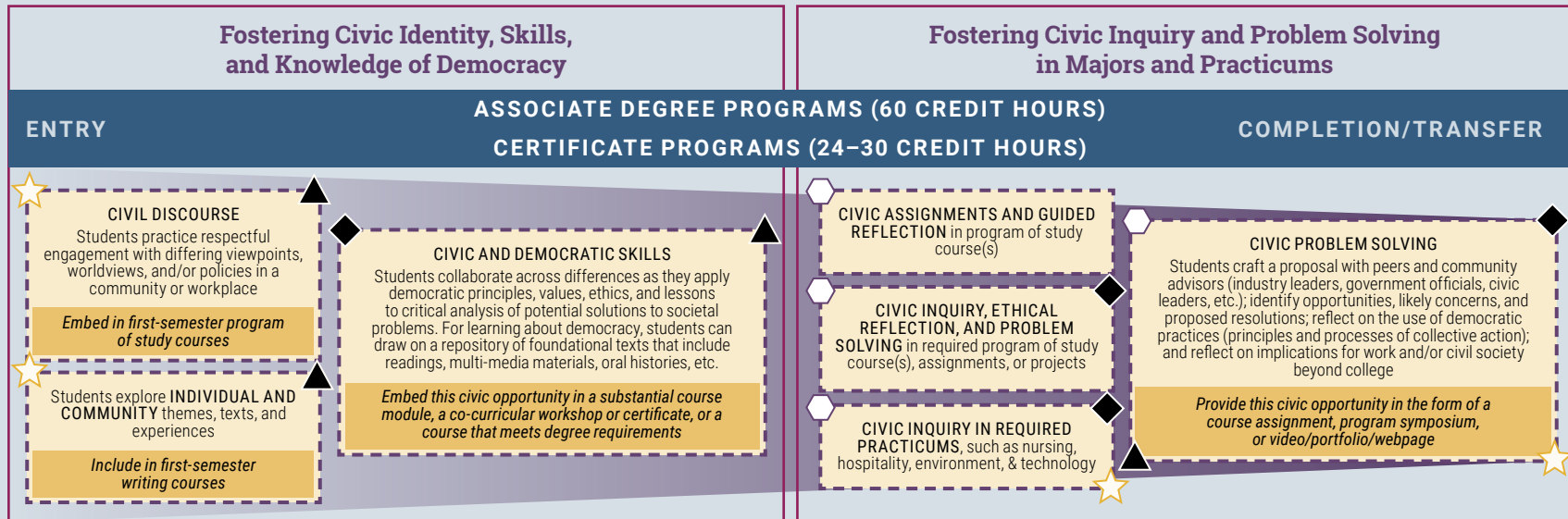
Across this sample curriculum, faculty ask students to complete assignments, projects, and practicums in which they (a) wrestle with significant societal problems; (b) collect and organize different viewpoints about problems and proposed solutions; (c) work with others across differences to apply democratic values in critical analysis and problem solving; and (d) reflect on ways their civic and democratic learning can be used in their careers and society.

High-Value Skills Needed in Both Careers and Democracy

- Communications skills
- Critical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning
- Digital, data, and media literacy
- Ethical reasoning and actions
- Problem solving with diverse partners
- Productive engagement with diverse views and experiences
- Purpose and agency grounded in a strong sense of identity

KEY

-  Exploring questions related to public good
-  Engaging diverse views & perspectives
-  Civic problem solving in program of study
-  Guided reflection
-  High-impact practices (HIPs)



Pathway Design Notes

1. This pathway includes multiple HIPs, beginning in the first semester, to increase the likelihood of completion while also fostering civic identity and skills.
2. For certificate programs, civic and democracy assignments and guided reflection should be included in selected program-of-study courses.
3. For both associate degrees and certificates, faculty should thread civic inquiry and guided reflection into practicums or other field-based learning requirements.

Every Student, Every Degree Sample Four-Year Guided Pathway Using the CLDE Framework

Through **civic learning for an engaged democracy**, students focus deeply on civic inquiry, ethical inquiry, diversity, and democracy across the curriculum. Colleges connect all of these areas to problem solving and weave them into general education and majors.

Students develop democratic knowledge, ethical responsibility, civic engagement, and high-value problem-solving skills that are essential for participating in a democratic society and adapting to a changing workplace.

This sample curriculum includes complex civic and democracy questions; inquiry and problem solving related to the major; a required community-based practicum; and guided reflection about students' development of purpose, agency, and voice from their first to final year.

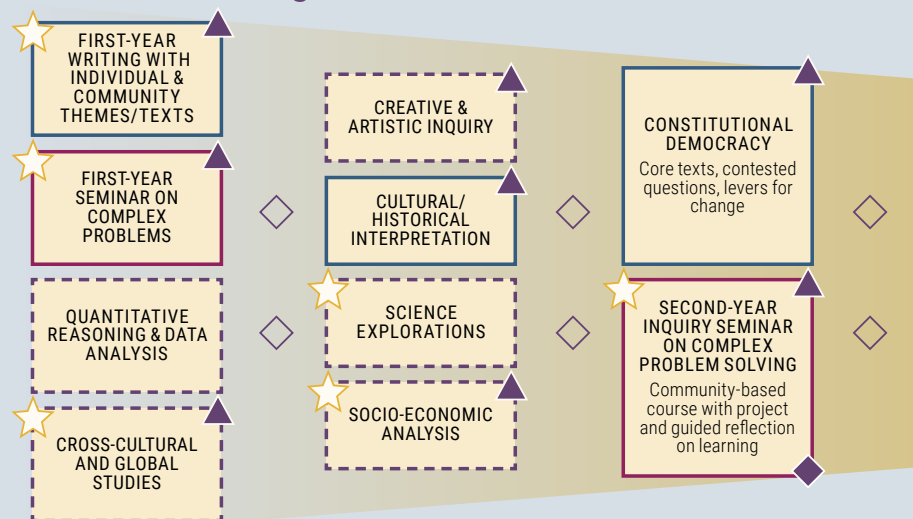
High-Value Skills Needed in Both Careers and Democracy

- Communications skills
- Critical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning
- Digital, data, and media literacy
- Ethical reasoning and actions
- Problem solving with diverse partners
- Productive engagement with diverse views and experiences
- Purpose and agency grounded in a strong sense of identity

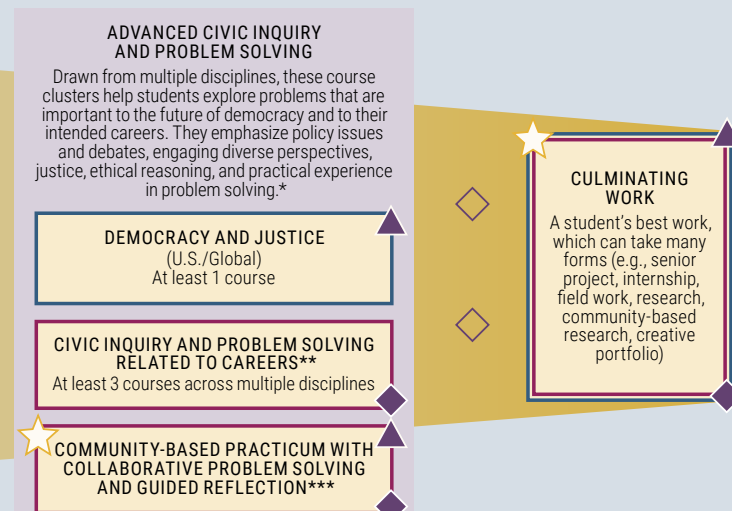
KEY

- Civic and/or democracy emphasis
- Problem-solving emphasis
- May explore questions related to public good
- ▲ Engaging diverse views & perspectives
- ◆ Courses related to student's major
- ★ High-impact practices (HIPs)
- Additional courses in student's major

Core Learning for an Interconnected World



Problem-Centered Course Clusters



E-PORTFOLIO SHOWS STUDENT'S WORK ON CIVIC AND SOCIETAL PROBLEMS OVER TIME AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH-VALUE SKILLS

* Research methods and/or evaluation of evidence are presumed to be part of the major.

** Sample problems for course clusters include: health policies and politics; social mobility; health and well-being; fueling the world; quests for justice and social power; traditions, cultures, and change; education and democracy; and markets and values.

*** This practical problem-solving experience may be part of the Problem-Centered Course Clusters or a standard part of the major. Where practicums are already required, faculty may choose to strengthen their civic, ethical, and justice components.

A Shared Responsibility and an Extraordinary Opportunity

Democracy is our shared responsibility — always, but especially in an era of division and turmoil.

This period is by no means the first time that democracy has been imperiled, both in the United States and around the globe. But this is our time, and higher education must recommit to that shared responsibility, with new vision, new vigor, and a new resolve to prepare all students for their roles in democratic society.

The only federally commissioned report ever released on college civic learning speaks eloquently to the kinds of learning on which democracy's future now depends:

*Graduates ... need to possess a strong propensity for wading into an intensely interdependent, pluralist world. They need to be agile, creative problem solvers who draw their knowledge from multiple perspectives both domestic and global, who approach the world with empathy, and who are ready to act with others to improve the quality of life for all.*¹⁵

The U.S. Constitution begins with the words “We the People.” Today, in marked contrast to *all* earlier eras when the United States faced crisis and rupture, the majority of “we the people” now enroll in postsecondary education.

This change in U.S. college-going gives higher education both an extraordinary opportunity and a clear responsibility.

Every U.S. student needs and deserves an education that helps them explore and discover their own role in tackling democracy's pressing problems and working with others, across differences of many kinds, to create a better future.

Taken together, the CLDE Framework; the design of intentional CLDE pathways from first to final year; and above all, the example set by Full-Participation Institutions help light the way forward.

Democracy will flourish when college study prepares all U.S. students, across all areas of study, to “act with others to improve the quality of life for all.”

*“Freedom is never really won.
You earn it and win it in every generation.”*

Coretta Scott King

¹⁵ National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. (2012). *A crucible moment: College learning and democracy's future*. American Association of Colleges and Universities. U.S. Department of Education.

The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition brings together education and policy organizations committed to making college CLDE a priority across higher education and in public policy. The coalition is led by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, College Promise, Complete College America, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. The coalition is working in partnership with more than 75 higher education and student success organizations, including many state systems, and all seven institutional accreditation commissions.

<https://www.collegeciviclearning.org/>

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