

Anne Colby, Tom Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont, and Jason Stephens. *Educating Citizens: Preparing Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003. ISBN 0-7879-6515-4.

Educating Citizens: Preparing Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility

Review by Constance Flanagan

The mission statement of virtually every university in the United States lists “educating citizens” or “preparing the next generation of civic leaders” among its primary goals and purposes. But how does the higher education community define these lofty goals, and what plans are put in place to accomplish them?

In *Educating Citizens: Preparing Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, Anne Colby, Tom Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont, and Jason Stephens tackle these questions head-on. In defining what it means to educate citizens, the authors are clear that moral and civic preparation must be intertwined. When citizens negotiate public issues, ethical controversies and moral dilemmas cannot be avoided. Thus, it is imperative that higher education train students’ intellect and conscience. Students need opportunities in their courses and in student organizations to wrangle with controversy and to do so in a civil fashion, to connect with other members of the public in communities beyond the campus, and to assume responsibility for the public problems we share.

The authors also remind readers that a *public* system of higher education has played a unique historical role as a foundation for democracy in America. And they provide a candid assessment of higher education’s priorities today. Despite the rhetoric in mission statements, moral and civic education is not the highest priority of most universities. Consequently, faculty who are committed to engaging students in ethical reflections, democratic deliberations, and public scholarship must work out (all too often on their own) how to do so in the midst of increased pressures to generate research publications and grants.

The empirical claims in the volume are based on a review of moral and civic education practices across colleges and universities in the United States and especially on in-depth visits to twelve institutions that varied widely with respect to location, size, type (community college, four-year college, university; public, private,

religious), and the diversity of their student bodies. Despite differences, the twelve sites are similar in the institutional commitment that leaders in their academic and student affairs offices have made to educating students for moral and civic responsibility. As a consequence, institutional resources have been allocated to promote those goals, the approach is holistic rather than piecemeal, and the commitment is to reach all students.

The volume benefits from the authors' collective scholarship and wisdom on the development of moral-civic identity in late adolescence/young adulthood and the historical role and contemporary challenges of colleges and universities in the democratic project in the United States. In particular, Colby and colleagues summarize the competencies students in the twenty-first century need if they are to exercise responsibility and leadership in their vocational, personal, and civic lives. These are organized into three clusters:

- a) the capacity to interpret, judge, and understand complex issues, institutions, and ethical and democratic principles
- b) democratic dispositions, including an identification with and commitment to the common good, compassion for and trust in others, and perseverance in the face of challenges
- c) skills in communication, including moral and political discourse, in political participation and intergroup collaboration, and the capacity to work collectively

This thoughtful analysis of student competencies that should be the aim of higher education is one important contribution that this volume makes to national discussions of the mission of higher education. Descriptions of what the authors refer to as *pedagogies of engagement*, especially as they are enacted at the twelve institutions, is another way they give substance and meaning to the outreach mission of higher education. For example, in describing service-learning as a pedagogy of engagement, the authors are clear that students should not *do service for* a community. To achieve a pedagogy of engagement, students and faculty need to collaborate with members of and agencies in the community in defining a useful service project; they also need to be aware of the historical relationship between the university and the community in which they will engage.

The value of field experiences for moral and civic understanding is that they place students in contexts that involve social and conceptual complexity and ambiguity, often elicit emotional

responses, and cause students to examine preconceptions—that is, stereotypes and other assumptions. Consequently, such engaged learning tends to be deeper and more reflective. Compared to the classroom, the community context also is more like the settings where, ultimately, students will apply what they have learned. Thus, such engaged learning is more likely to be useful and retained.

Educating Citizens does not directly address two issues that I think need to be part of the next stage in discussions of public scholarship in higher education. The first is, How can faculty engage with students in grappling with ethical dilemmas and public issues and still make tenure? I have been in far too many conversations at far too many universities where the common wisdom is that junior faculty should first achieve tenure—by doing a good job of teaching and a great job of research—but should wait till after tenure to do engaged scholarship. The authors of *Educating Citizens* describe colleges that intentionally recruit faculty who are committed to the scholarship of teaching, integration, and application. They also praise instructors who are so committed to engaged learning that they insist on doing it, despite the reward systems in place at their institutions. (The authors also note that faculty say that they reap rewards from doing what they believe is right and from learning with their students).

The second question that is begging for a broader discussion concerns graduate education—how are we training the next generation of engaged public scholars? The motivation of many young scholars as they enter graduate school is not merely to get ahead but to make a difference. They want to address public problems, and they feel that the analytic and perspective-taking skills they will learn in graduate school will be of use. All too often their training is focused in narrow silos of knowledge, language, and methods of inquiry. Rarely, if ever, do they gain skills in translating scholarship to make it accessible to a broad and diverse public.

My aim in raising these issues is not to criticize the authors of *Educating Citizens*. Dealing with such questions was not a goal of the volume. Rather, I raise them for a broader discussion since they are *public issues*, and we cannot be content with individual faculty and students resolving them on their own.

The unique contribution of the volume is the focus on civic-moral development during the young adult years and the promise of higher education in contributing to it. With respect to outreach and engagement in higher education, the authors provide a compelling developmental argument—the young adult years are an

ideal period to develop moral and civic maturity. But such growth is not inevitable. The authors of *Educating Citizens* outline a set of integrated practices for colleges and universities, including community connection and social responsibility; however, they also emphasize the critical role of teachers in guiding students' reflection on thorny public issues.

About the Reviewer

- Connie Flanagan is a professor of youth civic development in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Penn State University, where she codirects the intercollege minor in civic and community engagement. Flanagan's program of research concerns young people's theories about the social contract—that is, their views of the rights and responsibilities that bind members of society together, and the factors in families, schools, and community-based organizations that promote civic values and competencies in young people.