**Are We Still Bowling Alone?**

**Lessons from the American Democracy Project**

It was January 20, 2001. I had joined with others in a march around the Supreme Court, led by

the Reverend Al Sharpton, protesting the Court's decision to end the election chaos in Florida in a

decision that awarded the presidency to George W. Bush. As our somewhat ragtag group marched

down First Street Northeast in front of the court, across the street were hundreds of supporters of

President Bush, dressed in their finest, headed towards the inauguration on the west side of the Capitol.

We stared at each other, a few folks yelled (mostly ours), and police formed a barricade to keep our two

groups apart. All over the city of Washington, protesters marched and demonstrated, the largest

demonstrations since Vietnam and civil rights. Some of you may remember that time. Our country had

just been thru a bitter and divisive presidential election, which prompted me to join that march in a

January freezing rain.

Little did I know that those sometimes-raucous confrontations would mark the beginning of a

period of bitterness and rancor that has grown to a terrifying split in our nation, where hyper-partisan

politics threaten our democracy. I had only been in my position as a vice president at the American

Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) for 2 years, just starting to figure out what I

wanted to do to make a difference. But I came to Washington with a background in history and political

science, as well as a keen interest in politics.

In the next several years, our political life got worse. The following year, we were reeling from

the shock and horror of 9/11, and then the drumbeat of war leading up to the invasion of Iraq. I

remember feeling a profound sense of vulnerability for our country. In that bleak time, I happened to

read a book by Robert Putnam, ***Bowling Alone***. Putnam noted that a whole series of informal

organizations had been created in the early part of the 20th century, grew throughout the first half of the

century, but then all began to decline and lose membership in the 1960s and beyond. Putnam blamed the decline on a number of factors, including the development and rapid adoption of television, greater commuting time, etc. Putnam's argument, put simply, was that social organizations developed special relationships between people who might ordinarily not know one another. These relationships created what Putnam called bridging social capital, and that bridging social capital was critical to creating and maintaining a healthy democracy. Putnam argued that our democracy had grown weaker in the face of new technologies and new circumstances that were fraying the connections we had with one another.

If Putnam was correct, I wondered, and older forms of association that created bridging social capital were dying out, what might replace them? At the same time, as someone who had once taught history and government in high school, I knew that civic education was slowly being eroded in the high school curriculum. In college, the general education curriculum, although the subject of constant and intense controversy, and while paying lip service to citizenship, seldom was intentional about teaching political and civic education. Not surprisingly, I viewed the problem as an educational challenge. There I was in Washington, D.C., thinking about our nearly 400 member colleges and universities across the United States. I wondered what we might do to address this issue. More accurately, we wondered what we might do. For by then, I was joined by my good friend Felice Nudelman, who at the time was the Director of Education for *The New York Times*. We found that we were both wondering about what to do. So together, we explored what we might do as a higher education community. There had been previous efforts to focus on civic engagement in higher education, most notably when Campus Compact was created in 1985. But much of the early focus of Campus Compact was on service learning, and we wanted to move in a more explicitly political direction. It's all well and good to serve food in a soup kitchen. But we should really be asking why we have hunger in the richest country on earth. For Felice and me, service had to be connected to or replaced with political and policy issues.

So we began a series of conversations with a group of about 15 AASCU provosts at each of the next 3 AASCU Academic Affairs Meetings. Those conversations, over about 18 months, led us to conclude that we needed to create a project that would allow campuses to engage in their own civic work and also join together in collaboration with other campuses, as well as external partners. In July, 2003, we took the middle day of the Academic Affairs Summer Meeting, and declared that it would be a day focused on civic engagement. We invited Tom Ehrlich, who was just finishing a book entitled *Educating Citizens*, to be our keynote speaker, and thus the American Democracy Project was born.

One of our first tasks was to figure out what civic engagement meant to us, and where we fit in the array of civic engagement groups. We formulated a notion about how civic engagement education occurs. We believe that preparing citizens requires 4 key elements: knowledge, skills, experiences and reflection. We viewed the whole of the field of civic engagement as a continuum from service to political action, but we were pushing the explicitly political for our national work. While we were not advocating mass protests or even more radical political action, we were certainly more towards to political than the service end of the continuum. I think there are two lessons there. The first lesson is that terms like civic engagement are loosely thrown about as if they are generally understood. We found that we needed to develop a theory of action to inform our choices of activities to undertake. Otherwise, we feared that we would simply take on the shiniest activities, even if they didn't really make much of a difference. The second lesson was that while political activity must be undertaken with care, it is ultimately far more impactful than service activities. Service activities are usually non-controversial and often make people feel good about themselves. But political issues are the heart of any program that seeks to prepare student to become informed, engaged citizens for our democracy.

The first two years of the project were ones of great exhilaration. When I first proposed to the AASCU president, Deno Curris, that we launch such a project, he was decidedly skeptical, despite his own commitment to civic work. He noted that we had no funding, and that campuses were struggling

with the downturn in the economy.  He asked how many campuses I wanted to be involve.  I said I

wanted 100 campuses, an outlandish expectation in an era when we worked with groups of 10 and 15

campuses at a time.  But reluctantly, with a look that suggested more pity than contempt, he agreed.

Four weeks later, we had 135 campuses signed up, and today, 270 campuses are involved.  We had

clearly struck a nerve.  The next few months were a blur of excitement and activities.  We sold more

than 2,000 copies of Tom's new book, *Educating Citizens*.  Several campuses undertook regional

American Democracy Project conferences.  We created a separate annual national meeting, held in early

June.  *The New York Times* published a full-page ad congratulating the first 135 campuses.  It was a

heady time indeed.

But my task today is not to celebrate those very exciting times, or even rejoice in the many

successes we have had as a project over the past 17 years.  Instead, I want to share with you the lessons

that we have learned, in hopes that some of it will be of use to you as you continue this work that is so

vital to our democracy.  Now, more than ever, your help, your leadership and your commitment is

crucial if America's experiment in self-governance is to survive.  I always remember the haunting words

of Benjamin Franklin as he participated in the Constitutional Convention.  Despite the fact that the

participants were supposedly working only to amend the Articles of Confederation, word got out to the

people of Philadelphia that something extraordinary was going on in the Convention, and that a new

form of government was being proposed.  Late one afternoon, as Franklin was leaving the convention

hall, a woman stopped him and said:  "Dr. Franklin.  What kind of government are you giving us?"

Franklin replied:  "A republic, madame, if you can keep it." If you can keep it.  As a citizen of this country

for more than 70 years, this is the first time that I truly wonder about whether we can, indeed, keep it.

*Bowling Alone* was published in 2000, so we are celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. What

an enormous difference the past 20 years have made in our democracy.  I used to be worried about

bitter partisanship of that era.  That's almost laughable today.  The political landscape today is as toxic

as I have ever seen in my lifetime.  Distrust is rampant.  Honest conversations seem impossible.  For me, this moment is best illustrated by a phrase used by the President's counselor, Kellyanne Conway, in defending Sean Spicer's characterization of the number of people attending the president's inauguration.  When challenged about the crowd size, she spoke of "alternative facts."  It used to be said that everyone was entitled to their own opinion but not to their own set of facts.  Sadly, that's no longer the case.  The political right and left see, hear and believe different facts.

One major culprit, it seems, is social media.  Here's the incredible irony of our age.  Technology, particularly social media, was supposed to connect us, not divide us.  And yet today, we are both better connected, in a superficial way, to friends' activities and cat videos, and yet in a more profound way, less connected than ever before.  The recent news articles giving advice about how to endure a family gathering at Thanksgiving in this age of division are illustrative of how far we have gone towards a tribalism that could destroy our democracy.  Technology, which was supposed to make us all more knowledgeable, has in fact made us more gullible.  Fake news, a moniker used by the president, is now everywhere.  Social media has turned out to be a highly effective disseminator of lies and untruths.  And that's before the "deep fakes" of audio and video recordings become prevalent.  We will come to a time soon when we will not be able to distinguish truth from untruth, fact from fiction.  How will we be able to function as a democracy when we are no longer able to distinguish the real from the unreal? Will we soon come to a time when we don't believe anything or anybody anymore?  The longer-term effect of fake news and deep fakes is a cynicism that may destroy the democratic spirit. Jefferson said that democracy relies on an educated electorate.  But what does educated mean in an age of unreason?

After all, democracy is essentially a compact among people to live together, respect the rights of others, and engage in self-governance.  The history before the United States experiment with democracy was essentially one of people living in communities with others who were similar.  The history of the world has been and certainly was then a long story of oppression of minorities by

5

majorities. Democracy was designed to provide rights for all, and respect for difference. But how does democracy function, indeed exist, in an age of lies and distortions? How, in the most diverse country on earth, do we learn how to live together and govern together? Here is the haunting question: Are we still bowling along? Indeed, are we even more alone than ever before?

But let me return to the story, the early years of exuberance about the American Democracy Project. My job, after all, is in telling the story to tease out the lessons as we all move forward with civic education. As the designers, Felice and I watched with enormous joy as more campuses joined the project, and as initiatives began to spring up all over. But after about 3 or 4 years of watching, my joy began to be tinged with doubts. Were we really accomplishing something? Were we really making a difference? Or had we fallen prey to a uniquely Washington D.C. disease, confusing motion with progress? I took a hard look at what was going on and came to the reluctant conclusion that too much of what we were doing was only episodic, celebratory and marginal. Episodic, celebratory and marginal. It was a moment of profound and disturbing insight. Was the program doing all that it could to make a difference?

So that's an important lesson. Be honest with yourself by conducting a candid assessment of your impact. And if you are not happy with your review, do something different. Said another way, for everything you do, you should assess for its impact, its importance, its scale. That assessment 3 or 4 years into the American Democracy Project was hard to make. People running the projects loved the roles they were getting to play, there was enormous enthusiasm by project directors and participants, and campuses were proudly touting the work in press releases and publications. And as a private confession, if truth be told, I was loving the role as the national coordinator. But once I realized that we weren't making a difference, or at least the difference we could make, I deliberately worked to change the focus of projects. I tried to engage more faculty, and to have the work occur more often in classrooms. After all, students spend the majority of their time on campus in classrooms, particularly as

more students work, more students are older, and more students have other obligations beyond the campus. I figured that if the American Democracy Project was to make a difference, and if it was to truly be scaled to reach a broader audience than simply just enthusiasts, ADP had to be in classrooms. So my focus became faculty and students in classrooms.

That is not to say that student affairs isn't a critical player. About 5 years ago, we invited NASPA, the student affairs professional organization, to join with ADP as a full partner in producing an annual national conference, now entitled CLDE, Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. We did so out of respect for the work that student affairs professionals do, and the new work that is emerging. Student affairs has been in the civic engagement work for a long time. Student affairs professionals were leaders in the formation of Campus Compact in 1985. So my new focus on faculty and classrooms wasn't out of some misguided thought that academic affairs was more important. It's simply that classrooms were our target because they were an often-overlooked opportunity. Academic programs don't focus as much on civic engagement; the curriculum doesn't focus as much on civic principles and practices of democracy; and faculty often do not have any training or experience in thinking about the civic implications of their disciplines.

In order to make our fledgling American Democracy Project more relevant and impactful, we began a set of projects that I called the Civic Engagement in Action Series. And out of that series of projects, I learned another critical lesson. We can't do it alone. Not only should we not bowl alone; we also should not engage in our civic work alone. Partners are critical to make projects work. They provide perspective, people, expertise and sometimes even funding. A review of the activities of the past 17 years of the American Democracy Project reveals an astonishing number of partners: our 270 AASCU campuses, not-for-profit civic organizations, *The New York Times*, and an array of others.

Here is a list of past ADP Initiatives that we designed, began and completed once we created the concept of the Civic Engagement in Action Series.

- **America's Future**: The America's Future Initiative, a partnership with Public Agenda from 2008 to 2011, focused on educating students about looming national debt and deficits, while exploring potential solutions.

- **Civic Agency**: The Civic Agency Initiative, a partnership with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship from 2008 to 2012, sought to produce a series of national models for developing civic agency among undergraduates.

- **Civic Health**: The Campus and Community Civic Health Initiative, a partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) from 2012 to 2014, was designed to identify and develop campus and community civic health assessments and tools, as well as action plans that responded to the findings.

- **Deliberative Polling**: The Deliberative Polling Initiative, a partnership with the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford, engaged 29 AASCU campuses in the exploration of strategies to engage students, faculty, staff and community members in discussions about public issues and to develop students' citizenship skills.

- **eCitizenship**: The eCitizenship Initiative, a partnership with the Center for the Study of Citizenship at Wayne State University from 2009 to 2012, brought together campuses to examine how emerging technologies, particularly social networks, support and facilitate civic and political engagement.

- **Engage the Election 2016**: The Engage the Election 2016 project, from 2014 to 2016, created a partnership with The Democracy Commitment and icitizen, a civic engagement app, advanced informed nonpartisan engagement in the presidential election.

- **Political Engagement Project (PEP):** In 2007, we created The Political Engagement Project, a partnership with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and a series of AASCU campuses.  The project advanced democratic and electoral engagement by providing students with both tangible and critical-thinking skills for participating in the political world.  A key finding of the project was that studying politics does not change one's political identity.

In each of those projects, I think, we moved away from episodic, celebratory and marginal, focusing more on core issues that engaged more and more students.  Along the way, we created friends, involved more and more campuses, honed strategies and practices, and perhaps most importantly, identified leaders who emerged from local settings that we could help move into positions of national leadership.

Today, the American Democracy Project has several initiatives underway, in service to our commitment to make our work more impactful.  One of the most exciting reflects my earlier concern about facts and fake news.  ADP's **Digital Polarization** Initiative is a broad, cross-institutional project to

improve civic digital literacy by teaching students to fact-check and contextualize information they encounter online, as well as alert them to mechanisms bad actors use to sow confusion and create social discord. Now entering its third year, the project is spearheaded by ADP's inaugural Civic Fellow Mike Caulfield of Washington State University Vancouver.  Mike recently received numerous recognitions for his work, including an article published this August in *Inside Higher Ed*:

https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/getting-beyond-craap-test-conversation-mike-caulfield.

Caufield's concern is that in the internet age, there are fewer filters:  editors, fact checkers, and other ways of determining the truthfulness or accuracy before something comes to you.   In this age, we are the filter.  In the *Inside Higher Ed* article, he gives an example:  You give students a link to a natural healing center proposing to cure cancer with baking soda IVs instead of drugs.  You ask students what they think.  Far too often, students make the following assessments: Well, it's a dot org, which is good. The person writing the article has an NMD, that's probably a doctor's degree, that's good. It's a medical center, that's good.

However, if you do a thirty second search on the web about this center, you'll find that the center has been criticized directly by multiple academics as being quackery, that the American Cancer Society has debunked the treatment, and that the inventor of the treatment was sentenced to five years for manslaughter after a patient died in his care.

So Caulfield advocates that the first thing you do is get off the page, and figure out the source of the article.  You become the editor, the filter.  He has developed a set of 4 moves to independently figure out whether the source can be trusted.  We were all taught to read in a world of editors and fact-checkers, so we read in a linear way.  Now, to determine the accuracy of materials that are not vetted, we have to immediately jump off the page and do some sleuthing on our own.  This project teaches students how to become independent fact-checkers.  Mike recently completed a successful nine campus

pilot of the project, and we hope to disseminate these lessons to many more campuses in the months ahead. The takeaway lesson for us is that citizens have to make decisions based on facts, and citizen preparation includes giving students the tools to combat fake news.

A second initiative still underway began a number of years ago. The **Global Challenges** initiative, launched a partnership in 2006 with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), brought together faculty from 12 campuses, reflecting diverse disciplines, including political science, economics, international relations, neuroscience, theater arts and social work to create a course to help students build an understanding of their role in effecting change in increasingly interdependent global society.

The interdisciplinary course they designed has been taught on a number of campuses at various levels and in various departments. On one campus, which used the course and extensively studied its impact, significant results occurred, including:

- o Increased retention and graduate rates for students who took the course
    - First year retention rate of 93 percent compared to 80 percent for those who did not take the course
    - Second year retention rate of 89 percent compared to 78 percent
    - Six-year graduation rate of 74 percent compared to rate for general student population of 50 percent
- o More than 75 percent of the students reported substantial or extensive growth in deep thinking, critical thinking and problem solving, empathy for people, media literacy, initiative and self-direction.

Several lesson emerge from this project. Students need to know more about the world, particularly to think effectively about America's place in the world. But equally important, courses that have compelling content are far more effective in engaging students and producing learning outcomes, especially in civic leaning.

We are seeing similar success through another of our initiatives, **The Political Ideology Diagnostic**. The Ideological Diagnostic is designed to quickly break down the ideological stereotyping that students and others do about themselves and about others in terms of hot-button public-policy issues. I believe that that stereotyping is a key factor in the current polarization that besets college campuses. The Diagnostic is a guide to productive political discourse rather than ugly rancor. Coupled with critical thinking activities, the Diagnostic increases students' ability to engage in deliberative dialogue, and be open to exploring complex political policy and issues. The Diagnostic has now been tested scores of times on thousands of students at different colleges and universities. Two striking findings emerge. First, virtually no one's answers are all in the same ideological quadrant. Second, in every classroom there are a range of ideological positions on each question. In other words, students usually think of themselves in one of the four ideological categories, but will almost certainly find that some of their answers are in different categories. And members of a class may believe that the class is made up, for example, of modern liberals but will likely find that it is actually made up of a range of ideological positions.

Another project is a course, **Science for Citizens,** developed by faculty at Sam Houston State University, which currently enrolls 400-500 students each semester. Students are introduced to the process of science through an approach that includes deliberative dialogue and provides students with the ability to understand empirical and evidence-based research without having to relinquish their core beliefs or religion. The results over a number of years now indicate that their critical thinking scores and acceptance of scientific facts like evolution are increased by at least five (5) points according to both CAT and the Measure of Acceptance of the Theory of Evolution (MATE). Said another way, at Sam Houston State, student critical thinking scores improve as much in that one class as other students' scores do in 4 years of college.

The success of the course is predicated on the interdisciplinary approach and providing faculty with the professional development to teach both the knowledge and the process of science through the use of a "flipped classroom" approach where class time centers on active-learning strategies, case studies, basics of argumentation and logical fallacies so that students have the benefit of experiential learning to increase their critical thinking skills and improve their appreciation and acceptance of science. The central hypothesis of the course is that critical thinking – defined as the ability to draw reasonable conclusions based on evidence, logic, and intellectual honesty – is inherent to scientific reasoning and is therefore an essential aspect of scientific literacy. Scientific literacy, then, can best be achieved by offering an alternative type of integrated science course that focuses on these foundations rather than on the traditional "memorize the facts" approach to science education.  The lesson from this course reflects the same ideas of other lessons.  Engaging content and effective teaching can produce high levels of student engagement and significant growth in critical thinking.

Another long-running project focuses on faculty professional development.  **The Stewardship of Public Land**, a week-long faculty seminar in Yellowstone National Park, began in 2006 with a focus on the controversy surrounding the reintroduction of wolves.  Over the years, the focus has included other controversies in Yellowstone: bears, bison, winter use and now climate change.  The project affords faculty the opportunity to listen to the various voices, perspectives and politics of the different stakeholders, while considering using that model to examine controversies in their own community. The program models listening to different viewpoints, critically reflecting on the controversy and its stakeholders, and exploring possible alternative resolutions of the conflict.  The lesson from this project is that a well-designed class can equip students with the capacity and experience of listening to people with whom they disagree.

A project just beginning is the **Citizen Professional Initiative**, which addresses strategies for building strong citizen professionals.  As "stewards of place" rooted in communities across America,

AASCU colleges and universities shape the identities and practices of professionals in every field. Citizen professionals add an important civic dimension to such professional formation. Citizen professionals see themselves as citizens – stewards of place – contributing to their communities and engaging for the good of their institutions through their work. They pay close attention to what their professions can contribute to advance the well-being of communities and society. They strive to empower fellow citizens through their work by being "on tap, not on top" and by advancing an ethos of stewardship in their workplaces and in their communities.

Despite the heavy focus on the classroom and courses through the projects I have described, we also support a **Voter Education and Engagement** initiative.  Our project focuses on comprehensive strategies to ensure that all areas of ADP campuses are actively working to increase informed political engagement of our students.  When we began ADP, our focus was on registering students to vote.  What we have learned is that registering to vote is not sufficient.  Only about 60 % of students who register to vote go on to actually vote.  What we focus on now is voter education and engagement with the issues, and that yields greater numbers of registrations and actual voting participants.  The results of the project's efforts are impressive and show a marked increase from previous national elections. Our pilot yielded a 65% voting rate at Metro-State Denver, one of our urban Hispanic serving institutions, and a tripling of voting rates at James Madison University, a more rural campus in Virginia.  Thanks to these efforts, we have seen positive voter turnout results at all our campuses.  According the National Study of Learning and Engagement (NSLVE) report, ADP campuses have the highest voter turnout rates of all higher education institutions; the national voter turnout rate for youth 18-29 was 46%, the national average for undergraduate students was 50%, and ADP campuses had a voter turnout rate of 52%.  We are currently working with ADP campuses and our partner national organizations to achieve much higher voter turnout rates for all of our campuses in the November 2020 elections.   The lesson here is

clear. Voter registration is not the focus; voter turnout is the metric, and education and engagement with the issues are the goals.

Two final observations about our civic work. Too often, I think, we tend to think of civic engagement education as occupying a place by itself, a distinct and separate sphere of activity. But we have found that our civic work is deeply connected to two other areas, career preparation and student success. Increasingly, we believe that one's civic role is inter-related with one's role in the world of work. Many corporations today think and act in their communities. Both civics and work address what Clayton Spencer, president of Bates College, calls "the purpose gap." The college recently released a major study with the Gallup poll, "Forging Pathways to Purposeful Work: The Role of Higher Education," that powerfully makes clear the need for such an effort. According to Spencer, "The study confirms that a focus on helping students find purpose in work is a powerful way of developing in students the kind of agency and adaptability they need to thrive in today's world." It found that 80 percent of college graduates believe "it is very important or extremely important to derive a sense of purpose from their work, yet less than half have succeeded in finding it."

Civic work is also tied to student success. When colleges move away from the typical introductory survey courses, and instead create courses that address real world problems, problems that students see every day, students become more engaged. They see a role for their college experience in helping understand and address community, national and global issues. We have tantalizing but limited evidence of that civic-student success linkage in the outcomes for students who have taken the Global Challenges course at Stockton University. But it makes sense that involving students in real world issues, and giving them tools to understand and act on those issues, is not only engaging but empowering, giving students a sense of agency and competence.

But while writing this story, I began to have profound sense of uneasiness. Are we doing enough? Are we doing enough at scale? Said another way, are we, in fact, making enough of a

14

difference?  I don't think so.  So here, 17 years into this project, and perhaps 14 years since the last time

I worried about the question of impact, I think we are once again at a turning point.   To produce

meaningful impact at scale, I think we now need another course correction, similar to the one that we

made so long ago, when I first worried that our work was celebratory, episodic and marginal.   The

projects that we have done have been fantastic.  The work on the more than 270 campuses has been

fabulous.  But can we do even more?  I believe we can.  But to do that, I think we have to think about

mobilizing the entire campus.  So I would propose that we move from primarily a project-based

approach to a campus-based approach.  I still love projects but I think they need to be joined by a focus

on all-campus activities.  I think that it will take the commitments of an entire campuses to make a

difference.  We have examples of the whole campus approach on some of our ADP campuses already.

For example, Sam Houston State University has a designation that is used to denote all of the courses on

campus that have civic content.  IUPUI had a Democracy Plaza where questions about national issues

could be raised and answered.  There are other examples but they are not as common as I would hope.

I think we need to be much more intentional, on all our campuses, about the campus commitment to

educating citizens.  If I could dream, every campus would have a standing committee from the entire

campus that would explore ways to increase civic education, both in academic affairs and student

affairs.  The provost would be the active champion and leader of this work.   Each fall, campuses would

hold a series of in-depth conversations about how to best achieve civic outcomes for students.  Each

spring, ADP campuses would convene a campus-wide event to showcase the ways in which different

programs and different faculty were preparing students to be informed, engaged citizens.  And every

campus would assess the civic outcomes for students in a variety of ways.

I also think that we as we push for campus-wide efforts we need to focus on really big issues,

issues that shape and define our democracy, and we need to do so at the largest scale possible.  Every

day, faculty on American campuses raise some of these large issues, but they often do it alone, only in

their own classroom, without making connections to others engaged in the same work. Even when students get a smattering of civic education, far too often it is disjointed, piecemeal and limited.

To tackle the really large issues, I think we have to adjust our frame of reference. If you step back from the particular, and try to see the whole, I believe that the core issue confronting our democracy today in inequality, in all of its manifestations: social, political, economic. Maybe that's been the core issue in the entire history of our democracy. But today, inequality seems particularly rampant throughout our society. Wealth for the few is accumulating at an astounding pace not seem since the days of the robber barons of the Gilded Age more than 100 years ago. And privilege and access are still obstructed by racism and classism for millions of students, systematically preventing the realization of the American dream, where the hope was that anyone could go as far as their talents and abilities could take them. To address the issues of democracy today, we need more than projects. We need campuses to engage all students in core questions of our democracy. What are the hallmarks of a democratic society? What are the desired outcomes in a democracy? How should government be structured to achieve those outcomes?

We need to have students and faculty reading provocative books that challenge our thinking, moving past the simple divide of right and left partisanship. For me, the most provocative book I have read recently is ***Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*** by Anand Giridharadas. In it, he argues that the wealthy makes millions and millions, then dole out a fraction to the rest, while making sure that their privileged positioned is never threatened. His comment: "These elites believe and promote the idea that social change should be pursued principally through the free market and voluntary action, not public life and the law." In the preface, he included a quote from Tolstoy. "I sit on a man's back choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all means possible…. except by getting off his back. **"

Among the theorists that he champions is Chiara Cordelli, a political philosopher whose critique is that capitalism unbounded can never produce the outcomes envisioned for all in a democratic society, for when wealthy people, and the foundations they create, attempt to solve problems, they speak for others, a distinctly anti-democratic approach to problem-solving. She goes on to say: "Our political institutions -our laws, our courts, our elected officials, our agencies, our rights, our police, our constitutions, our regulations, our taxes, our shared infrastructure: the million little pieces that uphold our civilization and that we own together- only these can act and speak on behalf of everyone. Our job is to make them do that, rather than working to weaken and destroy these institutions by thinking we can effectuate change by ourselves. Let's start working to create the conditions to make these institutions better."

As I look back at the 17 years of the American Democracy Project, a project that grew out of a discussion among a group of very talented provosts, I realize that we were not bowling alone. Instead, we were working together in an effort that has touched the lives of thousands. But as they say, if we do this right, the best is yet to come. So let me close by making two final observations. The first is that there is enormous joy in working together with others about work that is meaningful. I have created lifelong friends from this project and shared many happy times. There is indeed great joy in making this civic journey with others.

But the greatest joy is to be engaged in meaningful work. What an amazing privilege it has been to work in a democracy on democracy. The civic work we do, and the students whose lives we touch, elevate our day-to-day lives to lives of significance. This work is consequential. It has meaning because it has the power to shape the future. We never know the full impact that our work has on others but civic work offers the hope that our children can live in a more capacious and just and fair society, and that our work can create the conditions in which all Americans can live a better life. Democracy is not a spectator sport. If we are to have a robust democracy, all of us must be engaged and involved. The

burden, as it has been since this country's founding, is on all of us.  The Preamble to the Constitution was clear about both the who and the what.  "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union…"  Our obligation is to renew, sustain, strengthen and protect our democracy.  And to do that, we as university educators must work tirelessly to equip our students with the knowledge, skills, experiences and reflections to be informed and engaged citizens.

Lessons:

1. Terms like civic engagement are loosely thrown about as if they are generally understood. We found that we needed to be explicit about the meaning of that term.

2. Develop a theory of action to inform your choices of activities to undertake. We believe that preparing citizens requires 4 key elements: knowledge, skills, experiences and reflection.

3. While political civic education must be undertaken with care, given the highly charged, partisan politics that surround and intrude on universities, political education is ultimately far more impactful than service activities.

4. Be honest about the work. Assess if it is making a difference, at a scale that is reasonable. If it's not, change course. Assess everything.

5. A well-designed class can equip students with the capacity and experience of listening to people with whom they disagree.

6. Voter registration is not the focus; voter turnout is the metric, and education and engagement with the issues are the goals.

7. A key finding was that studying politics does not change one's political identity.

8. Critical thinking is a fundamental skill needed by citizens in a democracy. Engaging content and effective teaching can produce high levels of student engagement and significant growth in critical thinking.

9. Students need to know more about the world, particularly to think effectively about America's place in the world.

10. Courses that have compelling content are far more effective in engaging students and producing learning outcomes; those same courses can improve student success.

11. We can't do it alone. Partners are critical to make civic projects work.

12. We need to include not only a project-centered approach but also a whole campus approach.