MORAL AND CIVIC DEVELOPMENT AS GOALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This chapter takes up the question of what kinds of influence undergraduate education can have on students’ development as ethical, committed, and engaged human beings and citizens. The undergraduate years are just one part of a life-long developmental process but, especially if the efforts are intentionally designed with these outcomes in mind, colleges can establish some groundwork that students will later build on, shape the intellectual frameworks and habits of mind they bring to their adult experiences, change the way they understand the responsibilities that are central to their sense of self, teach them to offer and demand evidence and justification for their moral and political positions, and develop wiser judgment in approaching situations and questions that represent potential turning points in their lives.

If a college education is to support the kind of learning graduates need in order to be involved and responsible citizens, its goals must go beyond the development of intellectual and technical skills and beginning mastery of a professional or scholarly domain. They should include the competence to act in the world and the judgment to do so wisely. A full account of competence, including occupational competence, must include consideration of judgment, the appreciation of ends as well as means, and the broad implications and consequences of one’s actions and choices. Education is not complete until students not only have acquired knowledge, but can use that knowledge to act responsibly in the world.

The suggestion that colleges and universities ought to educate for moral and civic values, ideals, and standards raises potentially contentious questions about what those values and ideals should be. Fortunately, there are some basic values that form a common ground to guide higher education institutions’ efforts to educate their students as responsible citizens of a democracy. Prominent among these core values are intellectual integrity, concern for truth, and academic freedom. By their very nature, it is also
important for colleges to foster values such as mutual respect, open-mindedness, a willingness to listen to and take seriously the ideas of others, procedural fairness, and public discussion of contested issues. The academic enterprise would be seriously compromised if these values ceased to guide scholarship, teaching, and learning, however imperfect the guidance may be in practice.

Another important source of a common core of values derives from educational institutions’ obligation to educate students for responsible democratic citizenship. Most college and university mission statements—for both private and public institutions—explicitly refer to their responsibility to educate for leadership and contribution to society. This conception of higher education in the United States dates back to the founding of the country and implies the centrality of values that include mutual respect and tolerance, concern for both the rights and the welfare of individuals and the community, recognition that each individual is part of the larger social fabric, critical self-reflection, and a commitment to civil and rational discourse and procedural impartiality (Galston, 1991; Gutmann, 1987; Macedo, 2000).

Beyond this generic set of core values that derive from the intellectual and civic purposes of higher education, some private colleges (and even a few public ones) stand for more specific moral, cultural, or religious values. These institutions’ particular missions—and the implications of these missions for the educational programs—are made clear to prospective students and faculty, thus providing the basis for informed choice in deciding whether to join a higher education community that professes particular values along with those that are inherent in the academic enterprise. The most obvious examples are religiously affiliated schools that offer faith-based education. Among public institutions, military academies are mandated to educate military officers, so their values are defined with reference to this goal. There are other public colleges that were established to serve particular populations, such as (American Indian) tribal colleges, which often explicitly acknowledge special values, such as traditional tribal values, in their curricula and programs, and private colleges that serve groups such as women, African-American women, and African-American men, drawing on their relevant histories in order to best serve these populations.

If the values on which there is broad consensus within an institution are taken seriously, they constitute strong guiding principles for programs of moral and civic development in higher education. Even so, they leave open to debate which principles should be given priority when they conflict as well as the application of the principles to many particular situations. Especially in institutions that stand for a commitment to rational public discourse, as higher education must, the most difficult questions of conflicting values are left to public debate and individual discernment. Moral and civic education provides the tools for these discussions and judgments.

**KEY DIMENSIONS OF MORAL AND CIVIC LEARNING**

Research on human development reveals three major clusters of capacities that are critical to fully mature moral and civic functioning, and all three can continue to develop during the college years, regardless of the age of the students. The first main area is moral and civic understanding. This includes interpretation, judgment, knowledge, understanding of complex issues and institutions, and a sophisticated grasp of ethical and democratic principles.
The second major area has less to do with understanding what is right than motivation to do the right thing. This cluster includes goals and values, interests, commitments, conviction, and perseverance in the face of challenges. It also includes a sense of efficacy and emotions such as compassion, hope, and inspiration. Closely related to these dimensions is the individual’s identity, a sense of who she is and what kind of a person she wants to be.

The third broad category is the domain of practice. Fully effective citizenship requires a well-developed capacity for effective communication, including moral and political discourse; many specific skills of political participation; the capacity to work effectively with people, including those who are very different from oneself; and the ability to organize other people for action.

First year college students exhibit a wide range of development in all of these areas. Students who enter college as adults may be more fully developed on many of these dimensions than younger students. But this is not necessarily true, since most studies show developmental variables to be more highly correlated with educational attainment than with age.

**Moral and Civic Understanding, Judgment, and Knowledge**

**Moral Judgment.** The ability to think clearly about difficult moral issues is important not only in the domain of personal morality but also in civic and political affairs, since they so often entail moral issues such as balancing the rights and welfare of individuals and groups. In response to research findings and critiques of various kinds, many features of the cognitive approach to moral development have been questioned and revised, and moral judgment has been reconceived as only one component in a complex set of processes. (See, e.g., Snarey & Samuelson, this volume; Turiel, 2008.) Even so, Kohlberg’s (1969) description of the increasing sophistication of people’s capacity to think about difficult moral issues remains a useful tool for operationalizing the intellectual side of moral growth, a dimension of morality that has obvious relevance for institutions of higher education.

Kohlberg proposed that the underlying logic or structure of individuals’ thinking about moral issues can be described independently of the content of their beliefs, and that this logic becomes more sophisticated and functionally adequate as development proceeds. In Kohlberg’s scheme, moral judgment moves from simple conceptions of morality grounded in unilateral authority and individual reciprocity to judgments grounded in shared social norms to an appreciation of a more complex social system to a perspective that is capable of evaluating the existing social system in relation to some more fundamental principles of justice. These shifts have important implications for people’s understanding of and judgments about a whole range of important issues. Kohlberg’s description of development within a framework of justice is particularly important for thinking about the civic goals of American higher education, since justice and human rights are central to US systems of politics and law.

**Related Dimensions of Social Cognition.** Moral judgment is part of the broader domain of social cognition, which includes a number of other dimensions that have also been framed in cognitive-developmental terms. Investigators studying the development of individuals’ understanding of friendship, interpersonal perspective-taking, political understanding, and religious faith have all described trajectories of increasing maturity, which are said to emerge from individuals’ attempts to interpret their experience as they
interact with other people and social institutions. Although development within an individual can proceed at different rates in the various domains of social cognition, the basic patterns of developmental change within these domains show striking parallels.

Studies of political understanding (Adelson & O'Neil, 1966; Helwig, 1995; Jankowski, 1992; Raaijmakers, Verbogt, & Vollebergh, 1998) have revealed developmental shifts toward increasingly subtle and complex conceptions of social and political institutions. Concepts such as civil liberties, methods of social control, and governance show regular patterns of elaboration as development proceeds. Political thinking has been described as moving from the personal or authoritarian toward greater comprehension of social structures and general principles. For example, younger adolescents are usually insensitive to individual liberties and opt for authoritarian solutions to political problems. At the same time, they are unable to achieve a differentiated view of the social order, and thus cannot grasp the legitimate claim of the community upon the citizen (Adelson & O'Neil, 1966).

**Moral Interpretation.** Even though the way people think about moral issues is important, this does not mean that morality is always conscious, rational, reflective, and deliberative. Often it is not. It is useful to distinguish between two quite different kinds of moral process, which have been termed “reflective morality” and “habitual or spontaneous morality” (Davidson & Youniss, 1991; Walker, 2000). In daily life, reflective morality, which involves careful evaluation and justification, comes into play relatively infrequently, when the right course of action is not obvious or when one’s initial moral response is challenged and there is time to reflect. In contrast, most moral actions—the many unremarkable moral choices and actions that characterize daily life—are not preceded by conscious reflection, but instead are immediate, seemingly intuitive responses. For example, most people do not have to stop and think before paying a blind newspaper salesman, rather than only pretending to pay. This kind of routine honesty is taken for granted. As the name implies, habitual morality is based in repetition over time, not only behavioral repetition, but also repetition of ingrained habits of “reading” or interpreting moral situations.

One reason that moral interpretation is so important is that in real life, moral dilemmas do not come neatly packaged like hypothetical dilemmas, which typically involve a given set of simple facts. In contrast, almost any real moral dilemma or question involves significant ambiguity, and interpretation of the situation can differ from one person to the next. Thus, in order to find meaning amid the moral ambiguity of real-life situations, people must develop habits of moral interpretation and intuition through which they perceive the everyday world. People with different habits of moral interpretation see the world in very different terms and are, therefore, presented with very different opportunities and imperatives for moral action. Through the aggregate of their moral choices in daily life, they actively shape their own moral reality (Walker, 2000).

But even habitual morality has important underlying cognitive elements. Our thinking processes rely on our capacity to recognize patterns in the environment, and this pattern recognition depends on cognitive schemas that derive from many sources. One source is the set of concepts and assumptions represented by cognitive-moral development. Even though it seems clear that people don’t deliberate about or argue through every moral situation in a way that mirrors the kinds of moral argumentation elicited in research interviews, different cognitive-moral frameworks (such as Kohlberg’s moral judgment stages) represent different sets of assumptions that help inform and shape
their reactions to the many small moral decisions of both habitual and reflective morality. In this sense, their conceptual frameworks, including understandings associated with their developmental stage, provide patterns or schemas that shape moral interpretations. The way people understand fairness, for example, will be a backdrop to the way they react to perceived injustices. Concepts such as distributive justice, moral authority, trust, and accountability are central to morality, and the way they are understood plays an important part in shaping individuals’ understanding of ambiguous moral situations. Individuals learn what constitutes a meaningful pattern, in part, through interaction with their social environment. As they participate in cultural routines, they acquire habits of interpretation consistent with that culture. The impact of the social context on habits and schemas is part of the broader issue of socialization of values.

Cognitive schemas can influence interpretations, judgments, and behavior without the conscious awareness of the actor, but it is also possible for individuals to reflect on and discuss with others their moral interpretations. These processes can lead to moral growth. In the many brief moments of moral decision we encounter every day, we have the capacity to reflect, and we have some room to choose the interpretation we settle on, over time creating new habits of interpretation that can lead in a different direction. This can involve considering and resolving several conflicting interpretations or questioning one’s original interpretation after confronting an uneasy feeling that one’s interpretation may be self-serving or biased in other ways. The capacity to override or change one’s own habits of interpretation is important, because by doing so we can actively shape our future moral habits. In this view of moral development, people can grow morally by making an effort to become more aware of their own interpretive habits, acknowledging and trying to overcome their biases, and working to understand and take seriously others’ interpretations (Walker, 2000).

Development of Moral Judgment and Interpretation during College. In part due to the availability of a measure that is easy to use (James Rest’s Defining Issues Test; see Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), moral judgment as conceived by Kohlberg has been included in many studies of college student development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Investigators have found consistently that attending college increases students’ scores on this measure, and many studies have found a significant correlation between adults’ years of higher education and scores on Kohlberg’s Moral Judgment Interview as well. Moral judgment stage is more likely to stop increasing at the end of formal education than at any particular age. In fact, some studies have shown a small negative correlation of DIT scores with age in age-diverse samples of adults (probably a cohort effect) and a larger positive correlation of DIT with educational attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Given the evidence that higher education contributes to higher levels of moral judgment, it may seem that colleges and universities do not need special programs aimed specifically at fostering moral development. However, the research in this area makes clear that there is significant room for improvement. Most college-educated adults do not achieve the highest level of moral judgment, reasoning instead at Stage 4 or some combination of Stages 3 and 4 (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983). Because a deep understanding of the American constitution and legal system requires a Stage 5 perspective in which the social system is understood to be grounded in fundamental human rights, the failure of many citizens to achieve that developmental level raises questions about their capacity to fully appreciate the foundations of American democracy.
A large body of research makes it clear that the experience of grappling with challenging moral issues in classroom discussions or in activities that require the resolution of conflicting opinions contributes significantly to the increasing maturity of individuals’ moral judgment. This is especially true when the teacher draws attention to important distinctions, assumptions, and contradictions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The college experience can also be a powerful opportunity for students to develop more reflective and mature habits of moral interpretation. Students bring their own characteristic habits of interpretation with them when they enter college, but their experiences in college have significant potential to reshape those habits. Much of the positive impact of programs that foster understanding across the diversity of a campus and its environment may reside in the power of those programs to make students aware for the first time of their previously unquestioned interpretive schemes, to bring their biases to light, and to highlight the inherent ambiguity of moral situations that previously appeared clear-cut.

This view of moral change also clarifies the significance of the reflection component that is known to be critical to the success of service-learning courses. Reflection on service activities often includes discussions in which students share with each other their interpretations of the common experience, along with written assignments in which they explore the ways in which the service experience changed their understanding of the people with whom they worked, the social issues their work confronted, and their relationship to those people and issues. This kind of activity is well suited for revealing alternative interpretations of common experiences and helping students see the personal significance of those alternative interpretations through self-examination (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

**Moral Relativism.** As students begin to question their unexamined assumptions and appreciate the multiplicity of interpretations inherent in any situation, they may conclude that there are no grounds for evaluating the relative validity of different, sometimes conflicting, moral or intellectual interpretations. At least some degree of both epistemological and ethical relativism are part of the predictable developmental sequence that college students go through as they begin to grapple with uncertainty and question the simple absolutes they previously understood as the “right answers” to complex and subtle questions. William Perry (1968) and others (e.g., King and Kitchener, 1994; Knefelkamp, 1974) trace a developmental pattern that shifts gradually from seeing the world in polar terms of right vs. wrong and good vs. bad to a point at which all knowledge and values are seen as contextual and relative, then eventually to a point at which it is possible to orient oneself in a relativistic world through the development of commitment, which is experienced as an ongoing activity through which identity and responsibilities are affirmed. Empirical studies of college students’ progression through this sequence reveal that many students move from the initial dualistic stage to the more relativistic positions during college, but very few reach the most advanced level—the stage of commitment (Knefelkamp, 1974; Perry, 1968).

In light of consistent findings that college students tend to leave behind absolutistic thinking but generally do not reach a full understanding of grounds for intellectual and moral conviction, it is not surprising that faculty report a great deal of epistemological and ethical relativism among their students. Although we are not aware of any systematic research on how widespread moral relativism is among college students (aside from the studies of Perry’s stages, which do not distinguish between epistemological and ethical relativism), many faculty and other observers have noted its pervasiveness.
College students’ relativism ought to be cause for concern among educators, because beliefs such as “everyone is entitled to his own opinion and there is no way to evaluate the validity of those opinions,” prevent students from engaging fully in discussions of ethical issues, learning to articulate and effectively justify their views, and adopting new perspectives when presented with high quality evidence and arguments. In essence, “the stakes drop out of ethical deliberation” and students are less likely to take it seriously (Trosset, 1998).

**Knowledge.** Even intellectually sophisticated reasoning and judgment cannot be powerful forces for effective action if they are abstract or disembodied. Being deeply knowledgeable about the issues is also essential. In addition to fostering clearer reasoning and more mature judgment, colleges can promote students’ moral and civic learning by imparting broad and deep knowledge bearing on civic, political, and moral issues.

At a minimum, foundational knowledge in a range of fields provides support for moral and civic effectiveness. The need for an understanding of basic philosophic concepts, for example, is evident in the phenomenon of student moral relativism discussed above. Students often fail to distinguish between a moral principle of respect and tolerance and the challenges inherent in evaluating the relative validity of moral claims. Insofar as these are developmental issues, it may take time for students to work their way through them. But coursework and classroom discussions focusing directly on these questions can contribute a great deal to clarifying the intellectual issues involved. And developmental research indicates that without foundational knowledge of basic political concepts, it is impossible to understand political stories or assimilate new information about political issues (Stoker, 2000).

Likewise, students need to develop foundational knowledge of democratic principles, as well as an understanding of complex social, legal, and political structures and institutions if they are to be fully prepared as engaged citizens. Research on the context-specificity of expertise suggests that programs fostering generic analytic capacities are not sufficient preparation for effective action. A general grasp of critical thinking and problem-solving that is not specific to the field in question does not suffice.

**MOTIVATION FOR MORAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

Like understanding, moral and civic motivation is multi-faceted, and includes values and goals; identity or sense of self; a sense of efficacy or empowerment; faith; and various aspects of moral emotion such as hope and optimism, as opposed to alienation and cynicism. Although the connection of higher education with moral and civic motivation may be less obvious than its connection with knowledge and understanding, colleges have great potential to contribute to students’ development in this area as well.

**Values and Goals.** There is a large body of evidence that a college education affects students’ values, goals, and attitudes. We know that changes in college students’ values depend partly on characteristics of the college they attend and on students’ entering characteristics, including gender, religiosity, and their own and their parents’ political views.

Even so, ever since the 1940s when research on these questions began to emerge, students in most colleges and universities showed some predictable shifts in their values, including increased socio-political tolerance, greater concern for civil rights and civil liberties, more egalitarian views of gender roles, declines in authoritarianism
and dogmatism, and more secular religious attitudes. Higher education is also associated with a modest increase in knowledge of and interest in politics (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Longitudinal studies indicate that most of these changes in attitudes and values are maintained in the years after college (e.g., Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks, & Warwick, 1967).

These changes in values and attitudes, along with documented increases in intellectual dispositions such as interest in and knowledge of cultural and intellectual issues, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility of thought, rational and critical approaches to problem-solving, and receptivity to further learning, are at the heart of American higher education’s espoused mission. The importance of higher education lies as much in these outcomes as in subject matter knowledge and vocational preparation.

However, as in the case of moral judgment, there is still immense room for improvement in college students’ moral and civic values. Some of the documented gains, though statistically significant, are small. For example, the impact of higher education on students’ social conscience and humanitarian values appears to be very modest (Pascarella, Smart, & Braxton, 1986; Pascarella, Etherington, & Smart, 1988). In addition, some positive shifts during college are not maintained in the post-college years. Sax (1999) reports, for example, that the percentages of students who rate as very important helping others in need, participating in community action, and influencing the political structure show temporary increases over the four years of college, but almost all of these increases disappear in the five years after college graduation. Finally, the rates of political participation among college-educated Americans are higher than among those without a college education, but only a third of the college-educated follow public affairs regularly and less than two-thirds vote regularly in both national and local elections. Participation numbers are significantly lower for the youngest cohorts of college graduates (Galston, 2001; Putnam, 2000).

This is not surprising, since most colleges and universities have only a few programs that specifically address the moral and civic development of their students, and many students do not take part in these programs. For those who do take part, the impact can be dramatic. There is clear evidence that high quality service learning and other pedagogies such as political deliberation or political action and research projects, are highly effective in increasing students’ moral, civic, and political motivation, understanding, and skills (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001).

In his book, *Involving Colleges: Successful Approaches to Fostering Student Learning and Development Outside the Classroom*, George Kuh and his colleagues (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991) point to the importance of several features of the campus culture that influence students’ moral and civic development. These include the institution’s history, traditions, language, heroes, sagas, physical setting, and symbols that express unifying assumptions and democratic values. The establishment and enforcement of policies that follow from the institution’s core mission and philosophy are also influential, as is the make-up of the student body and resulting peer culture. Although the “involving colleges” Kuh writes about make it clear that they stand for particular values, they also work to maintain open dialogue and sensitivity to student concerns. In an in-depth analysis of 12 colleges and universities that have shown unusual commitment to undergraduate moral and civic education, my colleagues and I saw this same effort to establish a positive and unifying culture around some core values, balanced with opportunities for
reflection on and critique of that culture (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Stephens, 2003). The importance of settings, stories, rituals, and other practices that we describe in that study are clear parallels of the features of campus culture reported by Kuh.

Students’ values and goals can also change through the extra-curricular activities they seek out, the people they encounter in the course of those activities, and the new demands that are made on them as a consequence. Among the most important of these activities for the development of humanitarian social concern and values are leadership programs (Kuh, 1993; Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnik, 1994) and community service (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Both of these are widespread in higher education in the US.

**Moral and Civic Identity.** Explanations of the psychological constructs and processes that mediate the relation between moral judgment and moral action have converged on the important role of an individual’s sense of moral identity. In this view, moral understanding acquires motivational power through its integration into the structures of the self (Bergman, 2002; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). If identity is understood as the core or essential self, those aspects without which the individual would see himself or herself to be radically different (Erikson, 1968), it follows that people will be motivated to act in ways that are consistent with this core self, to maintain consistency in regard to these essential features of his or her identity. When these essential features of the self include moral beliefs and convictions, there is strong internal pressure to maintain consistency with those beliefs. Of course, sometimes people act morally simply in order to avoid negative consequences. But many people act morally even when sanctions are not involved. In these cases, they do so, in part, because not to would be a violation of their core self; to do otherwise would be to betray one’s true self (Bergman, 2002).

Individuals’ understanding and experience of the core self develops over time, and the integration of moral convictions into one’s core sense of self is one of the most important features of moral development. Damon and Hart (1988) traced the development of self-understanding from childhood through adolescence, finding that younger children tended to focus on physical characteristics, skills, and interests when asked to define and describe who they are. Study participants did not begin to include moral qualities such as honesty or loyalty in their self-definitions until they reached adolescence.

Despite these predictable developmental patterns, both adolescents and adults vary in the degree to which morality is central to their sense of self and in the content of that morality. In “The Moral Self,” John Dewey (1998) wrote, “The real moral question is what kind of self is being furthered or formed” (p. 346). This question is central in studies of moral and civic commitment. Daniel Hart and Suzanne Fegley (1995), for example, found that in highly altruistic adolescents, moral concerns were more likely to be central to their current sense of self and their ideal self than in adolescents from a comparison group of normal but not especially altruistic adolescents. Similarly, Colby and Damon (1992) found that a close integration of self and morality formed the basis for the unwavering commitment to the common good exhibited by moral exemplars who had dedicated themselves for decades to fighting against poverty or for peace, civil rights, and other aspects of social justice.

Others have written about the development of political or civic identity in a way that parallels this conception of moral identity (e.g., Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Youniss & Yates, 1997). For example, Youniss and Yates present data showing that the long-term impact of youth service experience on later political and
community involvement can best be explained by the contribution these service experiences make to the creation of an enduring sense of oneself as a politically engaged and socially concerned person. In their view, civic identity—which entails the establishment of individual and collective senses of social agency, responsibility for society, and political-moral awareness—links certain kinds of social participation during adolescence and young adulthood with civic engagement by these same people later.

This question of the development of a civic or political identity may help explain why some changes that take place during the college years last well beyond college while others do not. McAdam (1988) studied adults who as college students had spent a summer taking part in the 1964 Freedom Rides, which sought to integrate interstate bus lines in the south during the Civil Rights Movement. This powerful and dangerous experience had a long-term impact on those who took part, and they followed quite different life trajectories than others who had volunteered to participate but were unable to join the group in the end. The follow-up data showed that the Freedom Riders' lives were permanently altered by the experience, and many went on to be leaders in community organizing for social justice, the movement against the Vietnam War, the women's movement, and other efforts to promote social change. The Freedom Ride experience had changed their understanding, beliefs, and values in a number of ways, and also seems to have changed the way they understand their own identities. McAdam explains one aspect of the difference between participants and the comparison group this way: “Having defined themselves as activists, a good many of the Mississippi veterans had a strong need to confirm that identity through [further] action” (p. 187).

Identity is one of a number of psychological mechanisms through which culture can have a long-term impact on an individual's behavior. The stories, images, and routines that constitute the cultural context can be incorporated into the participating individuals' sense of self, thus becoming a stable aspect of their orientations to themselves, other people, and the world (Newman, 1996). This can work for good or ill, depending on the cultural messages that are internalized. On some of the campuses my colleagues and I highlighted in our book, *Educating Citizens* (2003), members of the campus community were aware of the positive potential of this phenomenon. For example, at the College of St. Catherine (a Catholic women's college), stories of the courage and resourcefulness of the founding nuns were common knowledge for all students and were understood to mean that “We here at St. Kate's are women of unusual strength and moral courage.” Educators at the college hoped and expected that graduates would take with them a sense of self that includes these virtues, and our study showed evidence that many students had internalized the iconic founding narrative of the college.

What are the implications of this work for moral and civic education? We know that identity development takes place in part through identification with admired others (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Hazel Markus (Markus & Nurius, 1986) has described the interplay between people's actual and possible selves, which can include both the selves they hope to become and the selves they are afraid of becoming. Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that the self-construct is not singular but “a system of affective-cognitive structures (also called theories or schemas) about the self that lends structure and coherence to the individual's experiences” (p. 955). They present data suggesting that individuals can reflect on their possible selves, and they understand development as a process of acquiring and then either achieving or resisting certain possible selves.
Experience with people who provide either positive or negative models can contribute to the construction of possible selves and eventually to the individual’s actual self. Exposure to faculty members, residence life mentors, members of the community, and other students who represent an inspiring vision of personal ideals can play an important role in fostering the incorporation of moral and civic values into students’ sense of who they want to be and eventually who they feel they are. Likewise, awareness of why they do not want to emulate some others with whom they have contact can provide a motivating force through avoidance of a feared possible self.

Undergraduate programs that adopt an outcomes-based approach often include self-understanding and self-reflection among their goals, asking students to think about questions like “What kind of self should I aspire to be?” as well as the perennial college student question, “Who am I?” If reflections on questions like these are to have lasting impact on students’ sense of self, they must be of more than theoretical or academic interest. This can happen best when the questions are asked in the context of engagement with complex moral pursuits such as those provided by high quality service-learning, when students are engaged in this work with people who represent inspiring models with whom they can identify, and when the campus culture supports the development of habitual moral schemes that are consistent with important moral values. Both academic and co-curricular activities can contribute to students’ awareness of and reflection on what is important to them and to their sense that they can play an active role in determining what kind of people they become (Colby et al., 2003; Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011). Pedagogies of active engagement can be especially powerful in linking intellectual work in higher education to its significance for what kind of person the student wants to be.

Political Efficacy and Moral and Civic Emotions. Colleges and universities can also help foster students’ sense of efficacy. In order to be civically and politically engaged and active, people have to care about the issues and value this kind of contribution. But socially responsible values alone are not sufficient to motivate action. People also have to believe that it matters what they think and do civically and politically and that it is possible for them to make some kind of difference. This belief is what we mean by having a sense of political efficacy.

Social scientists agree that a sense of political efficacy is critically important in supporting political action. But having a strong sense of efficacy does not mean one believes that political action will necessarily have an impact. In fact, people who are highly engaged may not even ask that question. As former Czechoslovakian president and author Vaclav Havel said:

When a person behaves in keeping with his conscience, when he tries to speak the truth and when he tries to behave as a citizen even under conditions where citizenship is degraded, it may not lead to anything, yet it might. But what surely will not lead to anything is when a person calculates whether it will lead to something or not.

(as quoted in Meadows, 1991, p. 48)

Likewise, studies of people who have dedicated their lives to serving others and improving their communities have found that these extraordinary individuals rarely asked themselves whether they were making measurable progress toward their goals (Colby &
Damon, 1992). Especially when working to fight poverty, as many were, they would have become discouraged if they had focused on the question of how much progress they were making in relation to the magnitude of the remaining problem.

Others have suggested that promoting students’ political interest also requires imparting a sense of passion and even playfulness about politics. Political scientist Wendy Rahn (2000) argues that what students really need to learn about politics is “a love of the game and a sense of sportsmanship.” If they do that, the question of whether they are making a difference with each specific act is less central. And yet, fostering this love of the game, which pushes the question of efficacy into the background, is one of the most effective ways to foster a sense of political efficacy.

When one takes on great moral and political causes such as poverty or political reform, immersion in the process of collective action can preserve one’s spirits and determination. Thus, a love of the activity for its own sake, passion for the cause, and solidarity with others working toward the same goals can all sustain moral and civic commitment in the face of difficulties that would otherwise be very discouraging. An important question for educators, then, is how to help students achieve this kind of satisfaction in their moral, political, and civic discussions and action (Colby et al., 2007).

Moral emotions play an important role in motivating action (Haidt, 2001; Hoffman, 1981), and many programs of moral and civic education include efforts to elicit some kind of moral emotion, either negative or positive—outrage at injustice, disgust with hypocrisy, compassion for the poor, hope for peace, and inspiration through solidarity. Research indicates that the motivational impact of negative and positive emotions can be quite different. It is important to be aware of this, because many educators rely heavily on eliciting negative emotions as a means to rouse students from self-absorption. Out of concern for social justice, faculty often take a critical stance toward American history, culture, and politics. The goal is to shock students out of their complacency and motivate them to act through a sense of outrage. The irony is that in many cases, this critical approach, instead of solving the apathy problem, contributes to the growing sense of alienation and cynicism that students feel, and finally to a lack of conviction that anything can be done about the injustice, which seems so pervasive as to be unavoidable. The belief that corruption, exploitation, and greed are rampant (and perhaps even part of the human condition) can be used to justify a life of self-interest as well as a life of civic commitment.

A study of political advertising helps to illuminate this phenomenon. This experimental study (Rahn & Hirshorn, 1999) looked at the effect of arousing positive or negative feelings about the state of the country and found that both positive and negative feelings can lead to more involvement in community and political action. That is, feeling either more outraged or more inspired and hopeful can lead to more engagement. But the investigators also found an interaction between emotion and sense of efficacy. In this study, positive emotions (hopefulness or inspiration) led to greater interest and engagement among study participants who began with either a low or a high sense of political efficacy. In contrast, negative feelings like outrage mobilize those who begin with high efficacy, but demobilize even more those who start with low levels of efficacy.

It is likely that the teachers who create a sense of outrage by focusing very heavily on abuses and injustice have higher political efficacy than their students, so it makes sense that the teachers would feel mobilized by vivid critiques of the status quo and would expect students to be mobilized as well. But students who begin with low levels of
efficacy may be immobilized by the apparent hopelessness of the situation. An emerging understanding of this dynamic is contributing to a growing consensus that the most effective approach to civic engagement combines an appreciation of the ideals of one’s own democratic system—that democratic ideals are unrealized but not unrealizable—with a realistic sense of where one’s country has fallen short of the ideals (Damon, 2011; Gutmann, 1987; Rahn, 1992). This approach avoids both cynicism and naive, uncritical complacency. In practice, this is difficult to achieve. But teachers at all levels need to ask themselves which is the greater challenge (and thus worth the greatest attention and effort)—to make students more realistic or to make than more idealistic (Gutmann, 1987).

CIVIC AND POLITICAL SKILLS OR EXPERTISE

We have said that if we are to educate engaged citizens it is important for students to have a sense of political efficacy. But what about actually being efficacious as well as feeling efficacious? In addition to understanding and caring about justice, people need to develop the skills and expertise of civic and political practice if they are to be engaged and effective citizens.

Prominent among the needed civic and political capacities are skills of deliberation, communication, and persuasion, including the capacities for compelling moral discourse—how to make a strong case for something, ensure that others understand one’s point of view, understand and evaluate others’ arguments, compromise without abandoning one’s convictions, and work toward consensus (Colby et al., 2007). These capacities go to the heart of moral and civic functioning, because individuals’ moral and political concepts are both developed and applied through discourse, communication, and argumentation. Individuals take positions in the context of social interactions or discourse, which helps to shape the way those positions are played out, modified, and reconstructed (Habermas, 1993; Turiel, 1997).

Having these political and civic competencies not only makes effective action possible, it naturally leads to a greater sense of efficacy or empowerment, and leads people to see themselves as politically engaged and thus to be further motivated toward engagement (Colby et al., 2007; Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, 2002). That is, the development of skills contributes to and interacts with the development of values, understanding, and self-concept. Kuh and colleagues (1991) report, for example, that participation in leadership activities during college is the single most important predictor of students’ development of humanitarian social concern and values. The significance of developing these practical competencies is also evident in longitudinal research on civic engagement. In a comprehensive review, Kirlin (2000) found that involvement with organizations that teach adolescents how to participate in society by learning how to form and express opinions and organize people for action is a powerful predictor of adult civic engagement.

GENERAL ARCHITECTURE OF COLLEGE LEVEL MORAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION

There are three main sites of moral and civic education in colleges and universities, and all are important: the curriculum, including both general education and the major; extra-curricular activities and programs; and the campus culture, including
honor codes, residence hall life, and spontaneous “teachable moments,” as well as various cultural routines and practices—symbols, rituals, socialization practices, shared stories, and the like. Some of the most effective programs integrate learning from at least two of the sites—usually curricular and extra-curricular—and sometimes all three. Institutions that make undergraduate moral and civic education a high priority use a holistic approach in which moral and civic learning takes place in all three major sites and is well aligned and dynamically interconnected across sites (Colby et al., 2003).

**The Curriculum**

In curricular programs that make moral and civic learning a serious priority, courses intended to serve that purpose are evaluated and screened to ensure that they meet clearly established criteria of focus and quality. When colleges and universities are committed to reaching all or most of their students, they build moral and civic goals into required core courses and into majors in both arts and sciences and vocational fields rather than limiting them to electives that will be chosen only by students who already show a strong interest in ethical concerns or social responsibility. In addition, these institutions encourage faculty to employ a wide array of active pedagogies and provide training and other support in the use of these pedagogies.

**Moral and Civic Learning beyond the Classroom**

Moral and civic learning beyond the classroom includes both structured extra-curricular programs and activities and many aspects of the environment or culture. Leadership programs, service activities, disciplinary, religious, and political clubs, and programs designed to foster communication and respect across diversity are directly relevant to students’ moral and civic growth, but moral and civic learning can be incorporated into virtually any kind of student activity with sensitive guidance and support from faculty and staff advisors.

The campus culture is another important site of moral and civic learning. The culture of any given campus conveys many, often conflicting, messages, however, only some of which support the values the institution wishes to convey. Only by talking directly with students is it possible to identify which of the institution’s physical symbols, iconic stories, socialization practices, and widely shared key ideas are salient to them and how they understand the meaning of these cultural practices and artifacts. Institutions that have a vibrant tradition of social contribution, a rich set of public events that explore social and political issues, or a faculty that is especially engaged with the local or national community often highlight and build on these strengths to students’ great benefit (Colby et al., 2003).

Within the realm of institutional culture, honor codes are important ways to highlight some of the central values of higher education—honesty, trust, self-restraint, civility, and mutual respect. Research indicates that when honor codes make explicit the links between honorable student behavior and responsible citizenship within the campus and broader communities, enjoy faculty support, involve students in their development and implementation, are enforced fairly and consistently, and are accompanied by discussions of their meaning and rationale, they are highly effective in reducing cheating and fostering a strong sense of intellectual integrity and moral community (Bok, 1990; Cole & Conklin, 1996; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999).
URGENT AGENDA UNDER THREAT

Since the publication of the first edition of this volume in 2008, the traditional purposes of higher education, including cultivation of a life of the mind and the shaping of character, have come under increasing attack (Selingo, 2012; Tugend, 2012). Due mostly to the high cost of college and rising student debt, the pressure for accountability has intensified, and accountability criteria for what is often called the “education industry” are more likely to be framed in terms of graduates’ raw earning power (Mitchell Stevens, 2012). The popularity of vocational majors continues to rise, swamping arts and sciences majors, especially the humanities. Business is by far the largest undergraduate major in the US, and more than two-thirds of US college students choose to major in vocational fields. Unless faculty and administrative leaders bring to higher education renewed commitment to its formative capacities and creativity in weaving moral and civic learning into every field of study, the growing trends toward efficiency, economic conceptions of accountability, and narrowly defined vocational preparation at the expense of other goals are likely to weaken higher education’s capacity to prepare thoughtful, engaged citizens and persons of integrity and moral wisdom.

Studies show that, at the end of college, students who majored in business or engineering rate as significantly lower than other students the importance of developing a meaningful philosophy of life, influencing the political structure, improving their understanding of other countries and cultures, and related outcomes. Correspondingly, students in these majors rate more highly the importance of being very well off financially. Students in vocational majors tend to be more instrumental in their orientation toward learning—asking how each experience will help them get a job—and less interested in thinking about problems from many fundamentally different points of view (Colby et al., 2011).

On the other side of the gulf between vocational and arts and sciences education, the humanities report feeling under assault and are struggling to attract students. Their efforts to increase “rigor” and theoretical grounding for their scholarship often make their fields seem more esoteric and disconnected from the world of non-academic work (Kronman, 2007). Yet the humanities traditionally have been fertile grounds for fostering a wider sense of meaning, reflective exploration, the capacity to imagine alternative life paths that are driven by different sets of values, and the means to make thoughtful choices among those alternative paths. Serious attention to moral and civic learning in college can, therefore, benefit from drawing on the substance and modes of thought represented by the humanities, incorporating these perspectives into whatever fields of study undergraduates choose to pursue.

Although the increasing share of students pursuing vocational majors is, in some ways, a barrier to the widespread adoption of moral and civic learning as serious goals of higher education, this need not be the case. Preparing students for a profession or other vocational field presents many opportunities for teaching about the broader historical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts of that work, its potential impact on society, and the responsibilities of practitioners to consider those impacts and make them as constructive as possible. My colleagues and I have offered some suggestions for accomplishing this in several fields based on research we conducted at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2009; Colby et al., 2011; Sheppard, Macatangay, Colby, & Sullivan, 2008).
On a more optimistic note, it seems that faculty interest in active pedagogies has increased (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999), and many of these pedagogies hold strong potential for influencing not only students’ moral and civic understanding but also their motivation and skill. However, engaged pedagogies will contribute to the full range of moral and civic outcomes only if they are designed explicitly to do so (Colby et al., 2007, 2011). Well designed team projects, for example, can teach civic capacities such as collaboration, compromise, persuasion, and sense of responsibility beyond the self. And the more explicitly these goals are built into the demands of the assignment, the more likely students are to achieve the desired outcomes. Similarly, if the project’s substance invites consideration of political and policy questions or questions of ethical standards and choices, it will likely contribute to moral and civic learning. If not, the learning may be limited to technical or narrowly academic dimensions of the issues at hand.

Given the serious economic, political, social, and environmental challenges facing the world in the twenty-first century, this is no time to push moral and civic formation to the margins of higher education. Advanced knowledge and technical skill are urgently needed. But if students don’t also learn how to wield that knowledge and skill responsibly, they will be unable to meet the great challenges of their times. Higher education is in a strong position to enable students to make sense of the world and their place in it, to prepare them to use knowledge and skills to engage responsibly with the life of their times. In order for it to meet this potential, all of the major sites of moral and civic learning—the curriculum, student life outside the classroom, and the institutional culture—need to be integrated intentionally toward the development of moral and civic understanding, motivation, and skill.

REFERENCES


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