

The Futures Project: Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World
Frank Newman
October 22, 1999
Sachs Lecture, Teachers College, Columbia University

Rebuilding the Vision of Tocqueville

In the first Sachs Lecture, I argued that there is a period ahead of profound change for higher education. It is being driven by a set of forces that include virtual technologies, but even more profoundly the impact of computer-based technologies on pedagogy; by new providers both virtual and traditional, for profit and non-profit; by the forces of globalization; and by rapidly changing demographics. The result is likely to be more intense competition among institutions of higher education driven by market forces; more of a focus on learners and less of an institutional focus; more emphasis on outcomes and competencies rather than seat-time as a measure of educational performance; and a growing international dimension.

As part of a project funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ford Foundation, my colleagues and I have set out to help define a new policy framework by which higher education might be governed given the nature of these changes. Almost all of the current policy for higher education contemplates a more rigid and less competitive system of higher education with emphasis on regulation rather than market forces. We have also set out to gain the attention of political and academic leaders in order to encourage them to plan ahead together—to meet these new and changing times.

In the first lecture I noted, as well, the likelihood that the high rates of change present an opportunity for the higher education community if the moment can be seized. It is an opportunity to steer rather than drift along. It is an opportunity to address the issues as to what society needs from higher education. It is an opportunity to not only reach the societal goals but to avoid losing those key attributes of higher education that could be easily damaged by a shift toward market forces. In other words, planning for rather than stumbling into change is critical.

The primary issue of the first Sachs lecture was the question of what intellectual skills will be required for the workforce in the information age. As so often is the case, this issue is more complicated than it at first appears. The key point, however, is that universities and colleges are missing the mark in several important dimensions as to how well they educate students for the workforce.

The focus of today's lecture is on "Rebuilding the Vision of Tocqueville;" that is, insuring the civic skills required in the multicultural, international, egalitarian and changing age we face. As I argued in the case of workforce skills, the issue of civic skills is layered over with myth, misinformation, and hyperbole.

I would also argue that a focus on civic skills may be even more important to our national well-being than a focus on workforce skills, as important as that is. For one thing the economy is

rolling along. While there is a shortage of well-trained man power which is a brake on economic growth, the United States has managed to find various ways to fill that shortage. The primary disadvantages of the means that we have found are that they are inefficient and they leave out a significant part of the population—those at the bottom. We have a record setting boom without progress for those who are least skilled. This is a risk to our future growth and our competitiveness. But, at the very least, we as a nation are paying attention to the issue of workforce skills.

With regard to civic skills the issue is more urgent. While attention to this subject is still growing, there is little debate. The idea of education as a means of preparation for citizenship is an ancient one, dating back to Socrates. In 1852, John Henry Cardinal Newman, in the Idea of a University, said “A University training...aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life”¹. This principle has been widely established in American collegiate life as well. Some years ago I looked up the charters of a hundred or so American universities and colleges. Every one of them stated in its founding documents that a fundamental purpose, if not the fundamental purpose, is to prepare students for the life of the citizen.

There is, however, a growing body of evidence that suggests an erosion of the citizenship, a disenchantment with the functioning of the political system in this country that has led to a retreat in active participation in the workings of the democratic machinery. The most notable evidence of this is the steady decline in the rate of voting among eligible citizens, including among college graduates. But there are other indicators of the decline in participation in the political process as well.

A fundamental argument that I would like to make is that schools and colleges have a central role to play in addressing this dangerous situation. In some ways, they have already begun to do so. A decade ago, sensing that this was becoming an urgent problem, a small group of university presidents and The Education Commission of the States (ECS) formed an organization called the Campus Compact. Its goal was to get presidents of universities and colleges to commit themselves and their institutions to getting students into community service with an eye toward developing the habit of civic participation. Literally, hundreds of thousands of students have stepped forward to participate in all sorts of service. The organization has been an extraordinary success. Over 650 institutions are currently participating. A few years ago ECS established a second compact, the Compact for Learning and Citizenship, in which we asked school superintendents and chief state school officers to commit themselves and their organizations to getting school children into community service for the same purpose. Here again the results have been most rewarding.

Unfortunately, it turned out that we missed an absolutely crucial point. While students have flocked to community service and have accepted the idea that as citizens they have responsibilities beyond their own interests, as they have demonstrated over and over the

¹ Newman, John Henry. The Idea of a University: Defined and Illustrated. Ed. with introduction and notes by I.T. Ker. Oxford: University Press, 1976. 154.

willingness to help their fellow man, we have found to our surprise that this new found civic interest does not carry over to the political process. Instead, what students say repeatedly is that they have faith in their own actions, feel that they must participate, but the way to do this is to undertake a personal action. They want to tutor a child, to work in a soup kitchen, or perform some other important service but they remain cynical about participating in the political process, in the selection or operation of school boards, or city councils, or state legislatures, or particularly the federal Congress.

The result, I fear, is that we are in serious danger, that the political system is already malfunctioning in key ways. We need to rethink higher education's role as to how it can assist not just in encouraging community service, but in encouraging community service that leads to participation in the political process. As in the case of workforce skills, over the last few decades universities have defaulted on some of their responsibilities toward the creation of a workable civic society. There is, in short, much to be done. There are also, however, hopeful signs.

There is today underway in the United States a relevant debate about "social capital." In its simplest terms, it is a debate about to what extent has the American public become disengaged from community activities. It began with the publication by Robert Putnam of the widely read article "Bowling Alone." In it, Putnam argues that in all sorts of activities—the Lion's or the Elks, the PTA, the local political parties, Americans have participated in ever decreasing numbers. The example that gives the article its title, is that while the number participating in bowling is at an all time high, the number who bowl in leagues has continued to drop. Putnam argues this is one sign that the American public is slowly disengaging from group and community activities.

There are two important counter arguments: a new book by Everett Carl Ladd, The Ladd Report, and a report from the Pew Research Center, "Deconstructing Distrust: How Americans View Government." Both argue that there is not steady disengagement but rather a shift to different activities. Ladd, for instance, argues that soccer leagues have replaced bowling leagues. To my mind this misses the point. What Putnam was arguing was that while adults bowled together, the continuing contact gave them the opportunity to discuss all sorts of social and community issues: "Should we build a new senior center," "Are you really going to vote for that particular candidate," etc. Soccer leagues, where parents stand on the side lines and watch their children play simply don't provide for the same discussion and debate.

Still, there are interesting examples made by both sides. Putnam has taken these arguments seriously and has gone back and re-examined the data and has found several new large data sets to work from. In a new book about to be released he states his case with some impressive new statistics. However the debate finally settles out, there are two inescapable points. The first is social capital of the country is shifting. In weighing the impact of shifts, it is important to see that engagement in Parent's Against Busing is not the same as engagement in the PTA. There is a difference between "how do we create effective schooling?" and "I want things my way."

The second is that participation in the organized structure of the democratic process—most notably but not solely by voting—is declining steadily. Whether social capital is increasing,

decreasing, or shifting, political capital is decreasing dangerously. While much else is unclear or at least multi-dimensional, the change in the rate of participation in voting is clear and unambiguous.

The causes of the decline seem clear as well. Multiple polls confirm two principle reasons:

- People don't think that their vote or their participation will matter.
- People are increasingly cynical about elected officials.

The public sees the unwillingness to address issues such as campaign reform or gun control as examples where the public is strongly in favor of action and the political leaders instead worry about their own interests. The same cynicism occurred with the impeachment procedures.

While the public was disturbed by the president's actions they were far more concerned about the hypocrisy, cynicism, and self-interest of the Congress. This was in clear opposition to the mood that surrounded the impeachment of President Nixon, which was somber, thoughtful, and high-minded.

Many of those who have been studying and writing about the subject traced the root cause of the cynicism to the period of Watergate and Vietnam. Surely these were major factors in starting or at least accelerating the slide to disengagement. Watergate and Vietnam also accelerated the shift toward cynicism in the media. While the evidence is not clear cut, the media are seen by many, including thoughtful members of the media itself, as the source of much of the public's cynicism. Whatever the cause, it is evident that our political system is in trouble.

The clearest evidence of the problems of our political system is the decline in voting. In the last presidential election in 1996, the share of eligible voters who voted dropped to 49% from 62.8 % in 1960. And this despite the fact that, except in unusual cases, voting for the president brings out the highest rate of participation among eligible voters.

In the Congressional election in 1998, (the last congressional election in a non-presidential voting year), 36% of the eligible voters participated. This is the lowest share since 1942. This represents only 72 million out of 200 million eligible voters. If one takes the states that were not in the Confederacy, the share of eligible voters was the lowest since 1818!

Unfortunately, the situation is even worse among young voters. In 1998, among 18 to 24 year olds in the Congressional elections only 20 % of the eligible voters participated. Here is where Putnam has some crucial data. He has examined voting by age groups and compared it to historical patterns of voting. In others words he has compared 18 to 24 year-olds in the '98 elections with people who were 18 to 24 in earlier elections to see if we are losing ground. The answer is unfortunately, yes. Each age cohort is voting at a lower and lower rate. Consequently, unless something dramatic happens to reverse the shift, as older voters die off and new younger voters take their place, the participation rate will fall further and further.

Within each age cohort, better educated voters participate at higher rates than less educated. But even though the general education level of each age cohort keeps rising—we have for example more college attendees and more college graduates in each new age group than ever before—we continue to lose ground.

What hurts the most is our experience with the encouragement of community service. Recent college graduates—graduates in the last ten years—have been encouraged to participate in community service. Participate they have done; we are seeing a rising tide in students engaged in all sorts of community activities, from tutoring disadvantaged youths, to working in a soup kitchen, to starting programs focused on the environment, to aiding the homeless. Despite the growing numbers that have participated in community service, voter participation among recent graduates continues to decline.

Similarly, the new Motor Voter law provides greater opportunity to gain new registrants. Many university and college presidents participated in the efforts to ensure that the Motor Voter law included the provision that students could register to vote as they registered for classes. With the success of that effort, many more did become registered to vote. That simply produced more registered voters who did not vote.

A crucial question is whether or not it matters. Does it make a difference to us if only 36% of eligible voters vote for the Congress. The answer, I believe, is that it matters greatly. Even in the Congressional races, the idea that the winning candidate is only selected by a third of those eligible to vote in and of itself seems to be a major failure of the democratic system.

When one looks at elections for school boards, however, one can see the devastating effect of low voter turnout. When school board elections are held on their own, that is to say not in company with either Congressional, presidential, or gubernatorial elections, the voting rate often sinks as low as 8 to 10 %. At this level, the impact of special interests is profound. Small but dedicated groups, such as anti-tax organizations, creationists, or the unions begin to dominate the elections. In an election where only 10% of the eligible voters participate, 3% of the voters can have a determining impact. The result, of course, is school boards out of touch with the broader constituency leading to even further cynicism.

Another major disadvantage of low voter turnout is the loss of the rational middle. As fewer and fewer people vote, even at a voting rate of 36%, it is often the people who are more balanced in their concerns who have disappeared from the practice of democratic participation. Highly motivated groups determined to bring some change, groups in opposition to the interest of the majority, are often those who vote the most. One result is that elections are more virulent and more extreme.

Another impact of the increasing skepticism about the political process and cynicism about those in elected office is the trend toward government by referenda. A referendum is, after all, a step by the public to bypass the legislative process and take the creation of legislation into the public's own hand. In California, between 1956 to 1976, there were 29 statewide referenda. In the next 20 years from 1976 to 1996 there were 106 statewide referenda. Not only is this a huge increase, but many of the most important issues facing Californians were decided by referenda. Seventy-five percent of the Californians polled recently favor the use of such initiatives to solve problems.

When one considers the results of referenda there are serious civic flaws. Legislation produced by the referenda process is generally unpolished. It lacks the give and take, the careful crafting, the elimination of flaws, the response to accumulated testimony that occurs for legislation within the traditional process. Referenda also favor groups who have tightly knit organizations and have plenty of money and organizations, such as the group that has opposed the use of race in admissions to the University of California. It takes money and organization to generate the signatures, create the advertising, and manage the campaign.

Perhaps the most difficult issue is that referenda are hard if not impossible to reverse. Something like Proposition 13, California's Property Tax Limitation Law or the various state referenda about term limits, will find a dedicated group prepared to propose them and carry through the initial referendum. But who is there that will put up the money, organize the effort, and take on the political fight to try and reverse them if they prove to be inequitable? In fact, referenda are not only hard to reverse, they are hard to modify, so that they cannot be improved with experience.

A third concern is the growing unwillingness of leading individuals to stand for office because of the fractiousness within the legislative process and the low esteem in which it is held. In 1995, one indicator of the problem surfaced when young people were polled about their future interest. Only 21% said they had any interest in a political party and only 6% indicated that they would ever be interested in running for office.

Again one might ask the question, "Does it matter?" But surely the quality of candidates for office or even the presence of candidates for office is what makes the legislative process work. Last year, in the election for the Virginia state legislature, 64% of the races were uncontested. How can the democratic process work when 2/3 of the seats are uncontested? This sounds more like the kinds of "elections" we are familiar with in communist countries.

This issue was dramatized in this country by the recent burst of retirements by United States senators. My father, who had a series of wonderful sayings that he repeated at the appropriate occasions, used to comment about United States senators, "Few die and none retire." Today that would have to be modified.

When Bill Bradley made his public announcement about retiring from the Senate in 1995, he said the following:

"We live in a time when, on a basic level, politics, is broken. In growing numbers, people have lost faith in the political process and don't see how it can help their threatened economic circumstances. The political debate has settled into familiar ruts. The Republicans are infatuated with the "magic" of the private sector and reflexively criticize governments as the enemy of freedom, and the Democrats distrust the market, preach governments as the answer to our problems and prefer the bureaucrat they know to the consumer they can't control. Neither party speaks to people where they live their lives. Both have moved away from my own concept of service and my own vision of what America can be.

I am saddened on occasion when the media, and politicians, themselves, convey that politics is mean, cheap and dirty; that what we hold in common as Americans is somehow less than what we harbor in our hearts and minds for ourselves as individuals. I have never believed that.

As I listen to our current political debate, I feel that among the things missing are the big ambitions that have always guided Americans who settled this continent, ended slavery, won two world wars and saw our liberal democratic ideals triumph around the globe.”
--Bill Bradley, *Speech on Retirement*

This is hardly a testimonial for what has been widely regarded as the world's greatest legislative body.

Why is this happening? A number of observers have blamed it on the growing aggressiveness of the media, who, ever since Watergate, have been determined to prove that somebody is doing something wrong. There have been a number of studies attempting to pinpoint the effects of the media and while most agree it has become a problem, the evidence is still ambiguous.

Another factor is the fractiousness within the legislative bodies; the loss of dignity and respect across party lines and across factional lines. Watching the Congress of the United States these days and its self-interested bickering, its continuing attacks by its members on each other, certainly leads to cynicism about serving in that body. That fractiousness also appears in the electoral races which are becoming increasingly acrimonious, partisan, and negative. Negative advertising, study after study shows, damages the party attacked. It also, however, damages the party using the ads as well as the respect for the office itself. The recent races, such as Shumer-D'Amato for the United States Senate here in NY, demonstrate that bitter attack campaigns drive down the total voting, and deepen the cynicism about the political process.

David Skaggs, former congressman from Colorado, and the man who created the two congressional retreats in Hershey, Pa for congressmen and their families in order to bring the Congress closer together and to remove some of the bickering and factionalism, has an additional explanation. He argues that the steady rise of the influence of television advertising and the consequent urgent need to raise money for that has meant that candidates no longer have the time—or the need—to connect directly with the people. Rather they must focus on fundraising. The result, even for a candidate who wishes to stay connected to the public, is a gradual disengagement recognized by both the candidate and the public. Each feels more remote from the other. Neither knows what to do about it. Both recognize the inevitability of it. But the result is a diminished political process.

If one assumes that the rise in cynicism about and the decline of participation in the political process is serious, then what is the goal in education and particularly higher education? One obvious responsibility is the education of students towards an understanding of the nature, purpose, and history of government, or what historically we have called civics.

Over the past two decades there has been a major decline in the teaching of civics, both at the school level and at the post-secondary level. The subject has slowly been eroded. Today the typical student takes one semester, usually in the 12th grade. This small amount late in the school career is usually not enough to kindle any understanding or real interest. Civics has developed the reputation of being a boring subject. Teachers see it as less important, and most teachers are inadequately prepared to teach it. Beyond this civics has become a victim of the standards movement. With growing clarity as to what students should know and be able to do and with the increasingly important area of assessment against these standards, civics tends to become an also ran. While several states have some references to civics in their standards, only three have standards specifically for civics with a separate assessment.

There is a body of research that shows that the greater knowledge students have of the structure and nature of the American government the more interest they exhibit in the political process. Given this, the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 1990) to cover civics was discouraging. For example, only 38% of the 8th graders knew that Congress made laws. Nearly half of the seniors did not recognize a typical example of the checks and balance system of the American government. In two weeks, a new NAEP survey which will again cover civics, the first since the 1990 NAEP report, will be released. It will be a chance to catch up on where we stand on this critical issue.

In higher education the data is more limited. Alexander Astin in his most recent survey of incoming college freshman noted that only 25.9% rated “keeping up to date with political affairs” important; this even though 74.2% reported that they have volunteered for community service in the past year.

A second task that universities and colleges can and must undertake is the encouragement of community service and service learning on the part of their students. Fortunately, here the universities and colleges have been both effective and aggressive. While it is hard to determine the exact number of engaged students, there is no question that over the last decade community service has become widespread by college students. This has had a clear impact on their perception of self in terms of responsibility to their fellow man. What still is clear, however, is that this has not diminished and may actually in some ways increase the cynicism toward the political process though the data on this is limited at best and unclear.

We need therefore to find a way to integrate community service and service learning into the bigger picture of community life in a democratic society. One promising avenue is to create internships in the political setting—interns working for the city council, or the school board, or the state legislator—that allow college students the opportunity to participate first hand in the actual political process. Here they see that office holders are indeed interested in solving problems and actively working on them, contrary to their earlier perceptions. Several institutions, University of Southern California, Connecticut College, Trinity College, and Union College, already have extensive programs and the anecdotal evidence is that it seems to be working. Working in this case means a decrease in cynicism and an increase in the willingness to become engaged in the activities of the political process.

A few days ago, I met with Brown University students who had spent the summer as public service interns, working in state or local government. All of them reported with excitement and enthusiasm on their experience. Several reported that it had changed their career interest and gave them a new appreciation of the political process. Perhaps the most striking point that came out during the evening was made by the Director of the Center for Public Policy, Tom Anton, who noted that the students exhibited a marked difference from three or four years ago when all of the students went to Washington. They would come back from these summer experiences, discouraged and determined not to get involved with the political processes again. Perhaps there is an important clue here; the operation of the local and the state government clearly appears to be less partisan (in general though there are, of course, examples of the worst sort of partisanship at the state and local level), more focused on problem solving and more satisfying to young people in terms of meeting their expectations of democracy in action. Perhaps we can encourage political participation at the local and state level and begin building toward a different future.

The experience of these institutions—the University of Southern California, Connecticut College, Trinity College, Union College, and Brown University—all represent a crucial role of the university. The university needs to act as a role model of involvement in the political process. A recent poll of 18 to 30 year-olds noted that 40% felt that colleges and universities are the best institutions to solve problems in this country.

Clearly universities and colleges cannot be involved in the process of electing people into office on a partisan basis. They can, however, play a critical role in the electoral process itself through a wider role in the encouragement of the public, as well as engagement of the university or college in the solution of difficult problems. There is a long history of this exemplified by the Land Grant Act and the advent of Land Grant Institutions. What made the Land Grant program so successful was the commitment of the university to provide the resources to take the knowledge and skills developed both in research and teaching and apply them to public problems. Perhaps the greatest example of this was the University of Wisconsin and its concept of “the University and the Service of the People,” during the La Follette years.

Why shouldn't every public institution, from the community college to the state college to the state university, become a Land Grant institution? Why shouldn't the concept of Land Grant activities be spread across the entire face of the university and not restricted to just a few fields, such as agriculture?

Such a plan would benefit society and demonstrate to students the importance of being engaged in solving society's problems. But it would also be in the best interest of the university itself in terms of long term survival and support. The importance of this was made plain to me in some recent discussions with higher education officials during a trip to South Africa. Among other opportunities I had the chance to meet with several of the vice-chancellors (the South African equivalent of university president). All of them face difficult circumstances. Funding for all of the universities is being reduced even though everyone in the government understands the importance of universities to the country's future. However, with the accession to power of the new majority government there was an urgent need to address long overdue problems such as the desperate need for educational and health care resources for the black population. There is an understandable feeling among blacks that it is now their turn, that these more equal expenditures

should not be delayed. But to make serious change requires funding at a level that the government simply does not have. The universities therefore face intense competition for the resources that they need just to maintain their current services, let alone the new tasks that are being expected of them.

On top of that the universities face entirely new competition. There are 21 universities in South Africa of all types—the old Afrikaner universities, the British universities, the Coloured universities and the Black universities, as well as the Technikons which have gradually involved into essentially full-fledged universities. However, there are also 26 new operations recently established by European, Australian, and US universities that have set up operation in South Africa. Some of these represent only a program, such as a business degree. Others represent the start of an entire university such as that proposed by the University of Monash in Australia. Beyond this, there is a new group of institutions that have sprung up of small focused colleges, often for-profit, some non-profit. And on top of this there will shortly be three virtual institutions operating across South Africa. Put this all together and the universities find themselves with intense new competition and dwindling resources.

The universities are therefore surrounded by a sea of community problems—race, inequity, the need to develop a more vibrant economy, the urgent need to build a more functional civic structure, a requirement for sharply increased education quality. In addition, there is a shortage of skilled people to attack these problems. Civic engagement is a particularly urgent problem. Many of the black students empowered for the first time to enter the former prestigious white universities argue, “It’s our turn. I shouldn’t have to fight for this anymore. I should not have to pay tuition. I should have the right to go to college and move into the middle class.”

The universities are built primarily on the British model. I argued with the vice-chancellors that the universities must become agents of change. They must of course educate their students with the newer and higher levels of skill. But they need to give these students applied skills as well as theoretical. And the institutions themselves must begin to operate more like Land Grant institutions if they are to hold public and political support. If the universities continue to operate in the more aloof manner of the old style, they are likely to continue losing their funding. While the circumstances in the United States are far less severe, it seems to me the basic issues are the same. Can the university, with its skilled staff and enormous student manpower, help society better by becoming an engine of change? Can the concept of the Land Grant University be reinvigorated, spread across far more institutions, and spread across the whole of the institution not just a few disciplines?

Again using South Africa as an example, it is possible to see how these things can work. One of the opportunities I had was to visit a community clinic in the Hillsbrow section of Johannesburg. This is a section that had been largely white and largely middle-class until the change over at the end of apartheid. Now it has become a desperately poor black area. The University of Witwatersrand and the Witwatersrand Technikon have joined together to bring their medical and health care students to a clinic that carries on two main functions.

First, it provides direct health care for the people of the neighborhood (while simultaneously training the students). Second, it undertakes each year a new major research program to understand what policy changes are needed. The first such research program, undertaken three

years ago, was to find out about how healthy and safe the housing in the area is. Teams of students fanned out across the area and asked questions of the residents about their living conditions. These were brought together and analyzed by faculty and students. In the second year of the programs that same group of students analyzed the data and created a series of recommendations for the political authorities. In the third year of program, those recommendations were developed into an implementation program. Meanwhile at the start of the second year, the next group of students started a new research program which is following the same pattern—research, analysis and recommendations and implementation. At the start of the third year an additional program was undertaken. They expect to continue this process on into the future.

Here, then, is the university using its traditional skills to help solve an urgent social problem. Its students and its faculty are providing direct health care which gives them the opportunity to learn as well as contribute. In addition, the university, the faculty, and the students are using their skills as researchers to analyze the conditions facing people in the district and their skills in analysis to help formulate and implement policy solutions.

The South Africans have implemented another interesting approach to the same problem. They are plagued with the difficulty that about half of their graduating medical students leave to practice and live in another country, mainly Great Britain, but also Australia, and the United States. In a country desperate for resources and talented manpower this is hardly a rational way to spend scarce national resources. At the same time, trying to think of ways to prevent it from happening is difficult. The minister of health, a woman by the name of Zuma, has introduced a rule that each medical graduate is now required to spend a year working in a high need area. It could be in one of the black townships, it could be in a difficult urban area such as Hillsbrow, or it could be in a remote rural area. After a year, they are free to go about setting up their lives as they see fit. First of all, this means that each graduate repays the society for the opportunity to gain the medical degree and for the high public cost that is involved even when the student pays tuition. Secondly, it means that medical graduates begin to get rooted in community and many find their life's work as a result.

Finally there is another crucial role for the university—the creation of a center for objective discussion about crucial societal issues. This has been a traditional role of the university that has unfortunately atrophied over the last few decades. Historically the university had license to discuss issues that were important but made the society uncomfortable. This is the whole argument behind tenure and academic freedom. But this is more than just an individual protection. It involves the basic function of the university. The university was given the role and the right to sponsor such discussions because it was seen as objective, evidence oriented, open to all sides.

In recent times however, two things have undercut this role. One is an administrative fear of raising issues that will get the administration or the institution itself in hot water. The other is the tendency for campuses to develop a strong view of what has become known as political correctness. To a considerable degree, both of these self-imposed inhibitions grew out of the response to the Vietnam crisis on campus.

Where, for example, were the debates in regard to affirmative action in California, Texas, or in Washington? More importantly, where are the debates now about affirmative action anywhere across the country? This is an issue of immense importance to our society. Do we expect the universities of this country to be the leaders in creating a forthright debate? Do we expect the universities to invite the opponents of affirmative action and give them as fair and open hearing as that for the proponents? Do we expect the universities to be the developers of new approaches that give us the opportunity to move in new, more effective and acceptable directions?

Affirmative action is hardly the only issue that needs further debate. What about income disparity, or the effectiveness of the health care system, or the preservation and improvement of the social security system, or the danger involved in a nuclear test ban treaty? What is urgent is that the discussion must be balanced, thoughtful, involve all sides, and gain the public confidence.

When one examines the state of political participation in this country, it is, fortunately, not a sea of unrelieved gloom. There are signs of hope, signs of promise here and there. There are opportunities for new advances. We need serious public debate to capitalize on these signs of hope.

A first example is that for the last two or three years, the polls show a modest gain in the belief in the political effectiveness both at the state and local level. In my own experience, I found much the same as did the students at Brown. I've enjoyed my visits to state capitals and my discussions and negotiations with state and local leaders on improving education policy. I continue to find Washington a wasteland of acrimony and partisanship. Perhaps the place to start rebuilding the public sense of the importance of political participation is at the state and local level.

A second positive is that one can see some continuing gains in political participation as well as proven effectiveness with regard to certain subjects. A notable example is the environment, where public engagement has been high, the debate has continued over several decades, and real progress is there to be seen. The debate has also changed political behavior—it is hard for elected leaders to be anti-environmental protection. School reform is another case. It was widely assumed in 1982 and 1983 when the reform movement began that it would last a year at best. Here it is 17 years later and the reform movement is going strong. There are other examples, but these at least show that when a serious national debate does take place, this country can indeed fashion an intelligent political participation and response.

There is also widespread and growing political support for engaging young people in activities that build a sense of civic responsibility. Perhaps the most visible case of this is the creation of the Corporation for National Service. When the President proposed this, Republicans in Congress denounced the idea. The public response was such that they were forced to establish the Corporation and ultimately come around to funding it at a decent level.

The growth of the Campus Compact and the growth of the Compact for Learning and Citizenship are other examples where such actions have received strong support. Something like the Zuma Rule in the United States would, I believe be well accepted. The Campus Compact

continues to undergo a significant evolution. The original intent was to engage students in community service. In time, it became clear that it would help to go further and engage as many students as possible in service learning; that is, the performance of community service as part of a formal academic program, providing the student with a reflective component that encouraged deeper thought. This helped, but still did not fully address the need for a deeper civic engagement. The presidents engaged in the Compact have now gotten together and created a resolution urging themselves to inventory the effects of their campus in these areas and to take a bolder, deeper stand on engaging the institutions in the types of activities that we have described above, in the hopes of reversing the trend toward political disengagement. The Compact for Learning and Citizenship continues to grow at the school level. More and more schools are encouraging their students not only into community service but into activities that help in understanding the political process as well.

Fifth and finally, at the recent meeting of the Campus Compact presidents at which the resolution noted above was generated, Bob Putnam presented his new findings. In response to questions as to how we might begin to move this country forward, he made an interesting point. He noted that the United States has been through a number of crises of civic participation before. The most recent occasion when it was truly serious was the late 1800's and early 1900's when the trusts had become powerful and corrupt and were undermining the effectiveness of not only the state legislature but the federal government as well. Putnam pointed out that the response that worked was the creation of new political modes of operation. The primary election became widespread. Anti-trust laws were passed. Various forms of good government regulation were put in place. It seems to me we are ready for another round of rethinking our political structures to make them more responsive to today's needs and to reengage the public.

All of this should remind us that democracy is never an easy game. Democracy requires the practice of the fine art of intelligent compromise rather than ideological purity on every issue. It requires the commitment of citizens to abstract concepts. It is time we begin to rethink civic engagement in this country and the role of higher education in promoting an effective and working democracy. The task is to create a society capable of democratic and rational solutions.