

Community Colleges and Educating for Democracy

Carrie B. Kisker  
Center for the Study of Community Colleges, Los Angeles, California

John J. Theis  
Lone Star College System

Alberto R. Olivas  
Arizona State University

**Author Note**

Carrie B. Kisker, Center for the Study of Community Colleges; John J. Theis, Center for Civic Engagement, Lone Star College System; Alberto R. Olivas, Congressman Ed Pastor Center for Politics and Public Service, Arizona State University.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Carrie B. Kisker, Director, Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 9544 Cresta Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90035. Phone: (310) 951-3565. Email: [carrie@kiskeredconsulting.com](mailto:carrie@kiskeredconsulting.com)

### **Abstract**

The community college is widely viewed as an institution of democracy. Policymakers value it as a low-cost way to educate and train the nation's least prepared and less well-off, and students view it as a good way—for many, the only way—to educate themselves and transcend the social class into which they were born. Yet, acting as an institution or an agent of democracy is not the same as educating for democracy, which means engaging students in both an understanding of civic institutions and the practical experience of acting in a public arena. Educating for democracy is an active notion; it implies intention, commitment to an ideal. Whereas democratizing education is a function community colleges perform, educating for democracy is a choice, one that must be renewed and refined with each successive cohort of students, administrative change, and budget cycle. In this article, the authors explore several key questions related to community colleges and educating for democracy. In particular, how do community colleges and their constituents understand the notion of educating for democracy, and why is it important to the colleges' democratic mission? What challenges do community colleges face in educating for democracy? Finally, how do deliberative practices fit within community college efforts to educate for democracy? The authors contend that deliberation is a critical approach to educating for democracy, representing a way to redirect civic initiatives away from a focus on the problems *in* democracy to the problems *of* democracy.

*Keywords:* civic engagement, higher education, community colleges, educating for democracy, college mission

There can be little doubt that most of its constituents view the community college as an institution of democracy. Policymakers value it as a low-cost way to educate and train the nation's least prepared and less well-off; faculty and administrators find meaning in sharing their knowledge and skills with a diverse student body; and students view it as a good way—for many, the only way—to educate themselves and transcend the social class into which they were born. That community colleges democratize opportunity has become an accepted truism. As Kisker and Ronan (2012) wrote, “Even the most strident critics of community colleges do not challenge the value of the democratizing function; rather, they question the extent to which the colleges are performing this function well” (p. 6).

Acting as an institution or an agent of democracy, however, is not the same as educating for democracy, as Ronan (2012), Franco (n.d.), and others have argued. To some (e.g., Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007), educating for democracy means helping college students become knowledgeable and engaged participants in a political system. Other scholars and practitioners define educating for democracy more broadly, focusing not only on voting and other traditional democratic practices as outcomes, but also on civic leadership, community activism, responsible and respectful interactions with others, and a sense of civic agency, or the belief that one can make a difference in the world. The founders of The Democracy Commitment (2011)—a national platform supporting the development and expansion of community college programs and projects that engage students in civic learning and democratic practice—explain educating for democracy this way: “Beyond access to education itself, colleges and universities have an obligation to educate about democracy, to engage students in both an understanding of civic institutions and the practical experience of acting in the public arena” (p. 1). Peters (2012) provided yet another definition of educating for democracy, or what he calls “public work.” To Peters, public work “taps and engages and develops the civic agency, talents and capacities of everyone ... where the ‘world’s problems’ play out in ways that women and men can do something about” (para. 5). All of these definitions reinforce the Kettering Foundation’s conviction that colleges and universities must educate for a “strong democracy ... in which people have the power to shape their future” (Mathews, 2016, p. 33).

Educating for democracy is thus an active notion; it implies intention, commitment to an ideal, striving to develop in students the civic and social capacities necessary not only to succeed in college, but also to contribute

meaningfully to the health and wellbeing of their communities and the nation as a whole. Whereas democratizing education is a function community colleges perform, educating for democracy is a choice, one that must be renewed and refined with each successive cohort of students, administrative change, and budget cycle.

In this article, we explore several key questions related to community colleges and educating for democracy. In particular, how do community colleges and their constituents understand the notion of educating for democracy, and why is it important to the colleges' democratic mission? What challenges do community colleges face in educating for democracy? Finally, how do deliberative practices fit within community college efforts to educate for democracy, and what do colleges engaged in deliberation expect to gain?

### **How do Community Colleges Understand the Notion of Educating for Democracy, and Why is it Important to their Democratic Mission?**

Community colleges—like most complex institutions—are made up of a diverse set of constituents: students, faculty, staff and administrators, scholars and other commentators, policymakers, and to some extent, the public, whose tax dollars help to fund the colleges. Each of these constituencies views the community college and its mission and purposes differently, based on its own point of view and interactions with the institution. Therefore, it may not be possible to make blanket statements about how community colleges understand the notion of educating for democracy or why it may be important to their democratic mission. Perhaps the best we can do, then, is to tackle these questions from each constituent's point of view. Let's begin with scholars and other commentators, a group that is often comparatively removed from the day-to-day functioning of the colleges but one that may be the most heavily engaged in analyzing the institution's mission and purposes, as well as whether and how the colleges live up to those ideals.

#### **Scholars and Other Commentators**

Scholars have long believed that the community college has a mission to educate the populace for meaningful participation in democracy. Hollinshead, for example, argued in 1936 that community colleges “serve to promote a greater social and civic intelligence in the community” (p. 111). Sixty years later, in a history of the community college's first 100 years, Glazer (1994) identified three original purposes of the institution: to value diversity, to extend educational opportunity, and to encourage strong relationships and civic participation within communities.

Even some of the community college's most ardent critics agree that the institution has (or at least was intended to have) a larger civic purpose. As Brint and Karabel (1989) wrote, one of the community college's original functions was to create a "genuinely egalitarian system of education that fosters the development of a citizenry fully equal to the arduous task of democratic self-governance" (p. 232).

Although greater political participation is certainly one way in which community college students can participate in "democratic self-governance," scholars tend to view the community college's mission to educate for democracy more broadly, centering it on the communities in which students grew up and to which most ultimately return. According to Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014), community college civic activities—which, along with critical thinking and sustainable development, are central to what they argue is a rigorous, modern reconceptualization of a liberal education—are often "centered on issues that matter to students and to the communities from which they come and emphasize the concept of doing *with* others rather than simply doing *for* them" (p. 297). In other words, to scholars, engaging students in issues important to them, bringing "broad groups of citizens together to develop shared understanding, build capacity, and systemically address the problems themselves" (Carcasson, 2013, p. 19), is ultimately at the heart of the community college's mission in general, as well as its efforts to educate for democracy. These views undoubtedly influence the perspectives of other community college constituents, namely faculty and administrators, many of whom take courses on the mission and purposes of community colleges as part of their graduate training.

### **Policymakers and the Public**

Unlike scholars and commentators, who may disagree about how well community colleges educate for democracy but who generally agree that the institutions do have an overarching civic mission, there is little evidence that policymakers (i.e., elected officials, coordinating board members, etc.) feel the same way. Although policymakers—and the general public, for that matter—certainly place high value on the community college's democratizing function (its proverbial "open door"), they tend to view the purposes of such institutions as: (1) providing a low-cost and second-chance route to the baccalaureate for students who cannot afford or are not academically prepared to matriculate at a four-year university immediately after high school; and (2) acting as regional workforce training centers that can provide local businesses and industry with skilled workers,

thereby fueling economic growth and reducing unemployment (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). To the extent that educating for democracy contributes to one or both of these missions, policymakers are presumably supportive, but there is little evidence to suggest that the community college's civic purpose is ever discussed, let alone used as a rationale for appropriations or other major policy decisions.

Policymakers also concern themselves with issues of accountability. What percentage of community college students graduate or transfer within six years? How many pass remedial sequences? How many persist from one year to the next? If transfer and completion rates are relatively low (in comparison to four-year institutions), does this mean the public is not getting a good return on its investment of tax dollars? Preoccupied as they are with what they can measure, report, and compare, policymakers may appreciate that community college students leave the institution with an awareness of what they can do to help address major issues in their community or a greater ability to communicate with those who look, think, or act differently from them, but when it comes time to make appropriations or analyze performance, these outcomes are less salient, if they factor in at all.

### **Students**

While arguably the most important constituency on colleges campuses, students are often overlooked in discussions about the missions and purposes of community colleges. Thus, the literature contains very little information about how students understand the notion of educating for democracy, and even less about how they connect that notion to the historic mission of community colleges. Indeed, few community college students have likely spent much time pondering these questions; as Cohen et al. (2014) pointed out, most students entering community colleges “are less interested in academic studies and learning for its own sake; instead, they are interested primarily in the practical, which to them means earning more money” (p. 65).

Furthermore, numerous surveys conducted by the American Political Science Association (McCartney, Bennion, & Simpson, 2013) have shown that community college students are often disenchanted by the divisive nature of contemporary politics, which may be one reason why they tend to exhibit lower levels of voting and other forms of civic engagement than other college students (Lopez & Brown, 2006; Newell, 2014). In addition, community college students often do not believe that politics or democratic engagement will likely to make a

difference in their lives and communities, and thus turn to other activities, such as volunteering, from which they see a more direct impact. (As Theis [2016] observed, students do not often see a connection between volunteering and democratic engagement, which they define largely in terms of elections and voting).

Nonetheless, it is clear that at least some students greatly value the civic activities their institutions offer, the space colleges provide for student groups to engage with one another and with their community, and the civic agency, capacity, and knowledge they gain during the college years (Ronan & Kisker, 2016). Students routinely serve as catalysts for new civic initiatives on campus—for instance, voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, free-speech areas, democracy walls, issue forums—and for decades have initiated and/or participated in rallies, protests, sit-ins, and other forms of activism to advance causes in which they believe. Thus, while they may not make explicit arguments about how the community college mission is inextricably intertwined with educating for democracy, their actions make clear that many students believe this to be true. Moreover, while they may engage more often in activities, such as volunteering, which they view as less political, community colleges can influence students' perceptions of political participation through deliberative practices that provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to address what Carcasson (2013) called the “wicked problems” of democracy (Lawrence & Theis, forthcoming).

### **Administrators and Faculty**

Because faculty and administrators are ultimately responsible for whether and how community colleges educate for democracy, their understanding of the notion and how it relates to the mission of the colleges is of the utmost importance. Although both groups typically share an appreciation for a diverse student body and a belief in the college's ability to make a difference in students' lives, they may have different views on the importance of educating for democracy and play different roles in efforts to do so.

For example, many administrators believe that helping students learn to participate meaningfully in their communities and in a democratic society is central to the community college mission (though whether this belief is borne out of graduate study or their own experiences in their respective colleges is unclear). Therefore, college leaders can be and often are a driving force behind efforts to educate for democracy on community college campuses, although to be successful

they must go beyond stated promises and actively support civic work on campus. As Everley (1996) advised, this means that at least one influential leader on each campus “must be willing to champion and fund [a] program that some faculty may view as counter to their primary role” (p. 218). It also means working to institutionalize civic programs by integrating core ideas and effective practices into existing coursework or curricular programs and by supporting them with “hard money” from the college’s own budget, as opposed to “soft money” contributed by philanthropic or other external organizations for limited periods of time (Everley, 1996, p. 208, 230). Therefore, while many community college leaders may believe that educating for democracy is central to the institution’s mission, it is much easier to make statements in support of civic work than it is to take that mission into account in budgeting, staffing, and other day-to-day aspects of managing a complex organization.

For faculty, educating for democracy may take on a slightly different meaning as well as a different set of challenges. Community college professors tend to view themselves primarily as teachers and secondarily as emissaries to their discipline, in contrast to their university counterparts for whom disciplinary associations are often much stronger than connections to the home institution or to the students being taught (Cohen et al., 2014). Because of this, community college faculty tend to be interested in new pedagogical approaches, efforts to engage students from diverse backgrounds, partnerships with local communities, and interdisciplinary collaborations to improve learning experiences for students.

On one hand, educating for democracy easily fits within these interests, and indeed a great many faculty view it as an important aspect of their work. As Kisker and Ronan (2012) highlighted, many community college faculty see “the work their colleges do to facilitate civic engagement as central to the missions of their institutions, and furthermore, as a key way of operationalizing those missions” (p. 7). They see civic work as contributing to students’ capacities to “go back ... and be powerful members of their communities” and in the process equalize the playing field between the haves and have-nots (Kisker & Ronan, 2012, p. 7). As a result, many community college faculty spend a great deal of time and energy working with students outside of class and collaborating with colleagues across campus to provide activities and programming that they believe will enhance students’ civic capacities.

However, not all community college professors share the view that educating for democracy is central to the mission of the institution or to their work in the classroom. Faculty in disciplines where connections to political and community engagement are not obvious (e.g., math, engineering, and the hard sciences) may be less inclined to prioritize civic work. Furthermore, faculty from across the disciplinary spectrum share certain fears about educating for democracy. As Kaufman (2016) explained, many faculty are fearful of abusing their power by inadvertently imposing their values on students or worry that engaging in electoral or political discourse in the classroom is illegal or inappropriate (it is not). Because of these fears, Kaufman (2016) wrote, “many people in the academic world have come to see their roles as imparters of neutral truths and not as coaches of living, social, human beings” (p. 74). Helping community college faculty overcome these fears (Kaufman [2016] provides several ideas for how this might be done) may thus be essential if community colleges are to effectively educate for democracy and live up to their goal of providing educational programs and services leading to stronger communities (Vaughan, 2006).

### **What Challenges do Community Colleges Face in Educating for Democracy?**

As publicly funded institutions that receive roughly one third of the per-pupil allocations that public universities do (Cohen et al., 2014) and that educate higher education’s most under-prepared and economically disadvantaged students, community colleges face myriad challenges in providing students with the academic and workforce skills necessary to complete college and enter careers—let alone in educating them for meaningful participation in democracy. In the sections that follow, we discuss two major challenges community colleges face in educating for democracy: an inability to focus on the task given the day-to-day struggles to manage a complex public organization (this challenge is not unique to community colleges) and complications that arise from educating large numbers of students whose life circumstances limit the amount of time and energy they have for anything other than attending classes a few days a week.

### **Everyday Struggles of Managing Community Colleges**

In a recent book titled *Practical Leadership in Community Colleges* (Boggs & McPhail, 2016), the authors identified numerous challenges facing today’s community college leaders, including management and leadership issues, mission shifts, accountability pressures, finances and costs, diversity and equity,

governance and media relations, organizational change, and safety and security. Additionally, in the coming years, college leaders and faculty must determine whether their respective institutions should move from an a la carte model of course delivery (with something offered for everyone, whenever they choose to take it) to a guided pathways model (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015), in which curricular programs and student services are heavily coordinated and students are encouraged to select a course of study early on and stick with it. They must deal with declining state revenues and decide whether to continue to trim expenditures and/or raise additional dollars from property taxes, tuition and fees, or entrepreneurial partnerships with business or industry (or some combination of these). They must contend with pressure to shift ever more toward a workforce training model that prioritizes short-term certificates and vocational skills over more traditional liberal arts education and university transfer. They must educate elected officials and other stakeholders about student progress and outcomes measures that truly capture the diverse goals and lived experiences of community college students, and then develop accountability metrics to reliably assess them. Moreover, they must address these challenges while overseeing the daily operations of a complex institution, including managing staffing and budgeting, working with collective bargaining units and faculty senates, fundraising, interacting with the community, working with governing and coordinating boards, dealing with accreditation issues, and (not to be overlooked) ensuring that students are able to enroll, register for classes, access financial aid, work with advisers and tutors, learn about transfer and career opportunities, and, ultimately, complete degree or certificate programs.

While leaders at all institutions of higher education face similar pressures and obstacles, such challenges are heightened at community colleges due to their unique student bodies, multiple missions, and substantially lower levels of funding (Boggs & McPhail, 2016). As such, even when college leaders strongly believe that educating for democracy is central to the community college mission, they may view these other challenges as more immediate and therefore allocate less time and energy to actively supporting, encouraging, and funding civic work on campus.

### **Students' Lives**

The second major challenge to community college efforts to educate for democracy lies in providing civic programs and activities at times, places, and in ways that allow students to take advantage of them. As Cohen et al. (2014) wrote:

Unlike full-time students at residential, four-year universities, whose lives may revolve around classes, peers, and social events, community college students often struggle to fit required courses, tutoring, and other educational activities into schedules constrained by part- or full-time jobs, family commitments, child-rearing responsibilities, long commutes, or other obligations. (p. 53).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), one quarter of community college students have children, and almost half of these are single parents; 12% have a disability; 45% are the first in their families to attend college; 28% of dependent students come from the lowest income quartile; and 21% of all students reported incomes at or below the poverty level. In addition, roughly 75% of dependent students and 80% of independent students work while enrolled, averaging 24 and 35 hours per week, respectively (Perna, Cooper, & Li, 2007).

These social and economic realities constrain community college students' ability to remain on campus for study groups, meetings with professors, or extracurricular activities. They put downward pressure on levels of student engagement and connection to campus, as well as persistence and graduation rates (Astin, 1993; Cohen et al., 2014). These realities also limit the amount of time students have to engage in civic programs and activities, which means that efforts to educate for democracy on community college campuses may engage only a fraction of enrolled students. Despite these challenges, however, a great many community college students across the nation are involved in civic work on campus, and studies have shown that such experiences have lasting impacts on their lives (Hoffman, 2016; Kisker, Newell, & Weintraub, 2016; Kisker, Weintraub, & Newell, 2016; Lawrence & Theis, forthcoming; Mair, 2016).

### **How do Deliberative Practices Fit Within Community College Efforts to Educate for Democracy, and What do Colleges Engaged in Deliberation Expect to Gain?**

The vast majority of community colleges engage in activities or programs that contribute to a strong democracy, including service-learning, voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, and classroom discussions of policy issues. Some community colleges demonstrate a further commitment to educating for democracy by incorporating more intensive and transformative forms of democratic engagement, including deliberative dialogues, civic agency programs, candidate

and election-issue forums, community organizing and advocacy, and opportunities to write or speak to legislators about issues of concern in students' communities (Kisker, 2016; Ronan & Kisker, 2016). As Kisker, Weintraub, and Newell (2016) maintained:

Many of these activities are similar to those provided at four-year universities or community-based organizations, but can be all the more impactful at community colleges, where many students hail from low-income or racial groups that have been historically marginalized in both the nation's educational and political systems. (p. 316)

There can be no doubt that there is value in all of the ways in which community colleges educate for democracy and that the approaches listed earlier all have the potential to engage students in tackling the problems and issues affecting their communities. With the exception of deliberative dialogues and some civic agency programs, however, most collegiate civic efforts focus on the problems that occur *in* democracy (i.e., specific policy issues), as opposed to the problems *of* democracy, or how citizens can help to make democracy work better (Mathews, 2016; Ronan, 2012). Indeed, several scholars have argued that college-based civic programs must move beyond addressing the symptoms of social problems (e.g., homelessness, hunger, racial discrimination, low voter turnout) and focus instead on the problems themselves (e.g., mental health care, income inequality, disillusionment with government and elected officials), examining them from multiple angles, from various perspectives, and with people who may disagree with them but who will still listen and respond in a respectful and thoughtful manner (Carcasson, 2013; Lawrence & Theis, forthcoming; Mair, 2016).

By definition, solutions to wicked problems such as those listed previously cannot be good or bad, true or false; "they can only impact a problem and in turn give rise to additional spillover effects in other areas" (Lawrence & Theis, forthcoming, p. 3). Thus, orienting an institution's civic efforts around wicked problems has many advantages, including helping students understand issues from multiple perspectives, along the way building a skillset that is both relevant to the marketplace and critical for political participation; assisting colleges in rediscovering and publicizing their civic mission; and providing the community with residents who are well-versed in deliberative practices and able to apply their skills locally (Carcasson, 2013).

The art of deliberation, which is frequently taught and practiced on college campuses through structured deliberative dialogues, provides a way for students to address wicked problems and to become deeply involved in public decision making. As such, it is one of the most effective ways in which community colleges educate for democracy. Furthermore, deliberative experience fundamentally shifts the ways in which students view politics and the efficacy of discussing political issues, providing a “stark contrast to dominant models of adversarial and expert forms of political discourse,” and allowing students to experience how “everyday people” can participate in and influence public decision making (Lawrence & Theis, forthcoming, pp. 11, 20).

The deliberative approach “relies on citizens, not just experts or politicians, to ... come together and consider relevant facts *and* values from multiple points of view, listen to one another in order to think critically about the various options before them, and discover and work through the underlying tensions and tough choices” inherent to wicked problems (Carcasson, 2013, pp. 11-12). As Yankelovich and Friedman (2010) observed, deliberative engagement centers on tough, often conflicting choices and paradoxes inherent in public problems and asks participants to view them from multiple perspectives, ultimately agreeing on some sort of plan for action.

The deliberative approach includes several steps or processes, including “broad and inclusive research, identifying and negotiating both tensions and common ground, issue framing, [and] nurturing genuine engagement across perspectives,” with an eye toward exploring the tradeoffs and consequences of competing policy options, and supporting collaborative action (Carcasson, 2013, p. 13). Deliberative dialogues also typically require an individual to act as moderator, someone who focuses less on the issues being discussed and more on improving the quality of the communication. College students can be and often are trained to act as moderators in deliberative dialogues with their fellow students and community members, and indeed the act of moderating a dialogue may be even more impactful upon the transfer of those skills to real-world settings than simply participating in one (Mair, 2016). Regardless of whether the moderator is a student, faculty member, or administrator, prior to moderating a deliberative dialogue one must be trained in the principles of the deliberative approach and the skills of moderating.

The Democracy Commitment (TDC) approaches dialogue and deliberation training by working with interested colleges to identify a cohort of interdisciplinary faculty, administrators, student leaders, and/or community members to train in the theory behind deliberation, as well as the practice of holding and moderating deliberative dialogues. The goal is for trained and experienced faculty to become resident experts in these practices on their respective campus; these faculty can then help to perpetuate the practice and ideology of deliberation over time and also train successive cohorts of students to act as moderators for deliberative dialogues among their peers and community members. Administrators and other college leaders should also be trained so that they gain an understanding and appreciation for the power of deliberation—knowledge that will be necessary if they are to serve as champions for this type of transformative civic work on campus and in the community. Indeed, TDC deliberation trainings emphasize the ways in which an institution can build the capacity to continue training future moderators and thus create self-sustaining deliberation programs.

The deliberation training itself consists of engaging trainees in considering and discussing the role of the community college in educating students and community members about key social and political issues, as well as in engaging those groups in facilitated dialogues to work through differences and discover common ground, priorities, and values that are widely held in the community. During this part of the training, there is discussion about the key differences between deliberative dialogue (in which expert knowledge is eschewed and emphasis is placed on the citizen as a problem solver) and the more familiar models of debate and persuasive speech making. This helps to clarify the strengths, limitations, and useful applications for each dialogue model so that deliberation is presented not as superior to debate but rather as better suited to dealing with many of the most challenging issues within communities. The concept of wicked problems comes into play in explaining the differences between dialogue and debate, and is presented during these workshops in order to highlight the need for deliberative dialogue as a means of productively engaging students and community members in understanding and developing strategies to address the persistent and endemic (versus solvable) problems of communities.

A typical TDC deliberation workshop utilizes facilitated discussion to introduce trainees to key concepts and principles of effective public engagement practices; methods for identifying an issue's stakeholders and convening

representative and diverse members of the community to engage in deliberation; and the practices and strategies of effective moderators and recorders (note takers), including how to troubleshoot and evaluate dialogues. Each workshop provides ample opportunities for trainees to practice these skills through role-playing activities in simulated deliberative settings. Participants then have an opportunity to receive feedback from experienced moderators and to pose practical questions about issues they may face when moderating deliberative events in the “real world.”

Colleges participating in TDC deliberation workshops are encouraged to hold deliberative events on their campuses soon after each training in order to allow trainees to serve as moderators and recorders while the deliberation skills and concepts are fresh in their minds. This may be very intimidating to inexperienced moderators, especially students, but there are ways to make the initial experiences less high-stakes for beginning moderators. Examples include having classroom dialogue events, in which students moderate deliberative discussions—ideally in teams—for their own classmates and peers, as well as holding a larger campus or community event, but assigning participants to small table discussions so that each moderator need only facilitate the dialogue for a very small group. It is important for new moderators to receive positive and constructive feedback throughout this process. TDC urges faculty to follow up with students soon after the training to point out their strengths as moderators and to make any necessary suggestions. Finally, TDC encourages faculty to form internal networks on campus to revisit the role of deliberation as a part of the teaching and learning dynamic, and to develop discipline-specific topics and approaches to deliberation that have relevance to the curriculum.

Deliberation requires a substantial investment of time, energy, and support from faculty, administrators, and others on campus. Furthermore, it can be difficult, uncomfortable, and time-consuming for both participants and moderators. Yet, community college faculty and administrators are often eager to learn deliberative processes and engage their students and communities in dialogues because they believe that deliberation can be transformative for students and can lead to “enhanced capacity to act together to solve social problems (Mair, 2016, p. 112). They also expect that when students’ voices are heard, and when students can engage in dialogues and decisions about problems that affect them, many more will engage in political processes (Carcasson, 2013; Mair, 2016).

Community college faculty and administrators also expect that the skills developed and utilized in deliberative engagement will transfer to other aspects of students' lives, including their homes, relationships, and workplaces. Although scant, the research literature on the topic appears to support this sentiment. For example, based on extensive follow-up surveys, Mair (2016) found that students at her community college were able to transfer the dialogue and deliberation skills they learned to other contexts, "from the public spheres of work and community to the personal spheres of friends, family, and significant others" (p. 8). She also found that participating in a deliberative dialogue led students to feel more prepared, inspired, and responsible for addressing social issues, and thus more willing to participate in difficult conversations in order to solve problems and arrive at mutual understanding.

Similarly, Lawrence and Theis (forthcoming) found that deliberative experiences can fundamentally shift students' perceptions of democratic politics and the possibilities for political discussion. In particular, after participating in only one deliberative dialogue, students reported a broader understanding of what constitutes democratic engagement, including (notably) dialogue and collaborative action by everyday people in addition to elections, voting, and expert opinion. In addition, students recognized the promise of deliberation in helping to resolve the problems inherent in political processes, reporting a "newfound hope that better discussion skills can help improve our communities" (p. 22).

Deliberation, then—whether fostered in the classroom or provided through the extracurriculum—is a critical approach to educating for democracy, to engaging students in the practice of acting in the public arena, and to helping students understand that their voices and experiences can indeed impact communities and our democracy. Although there is also room on community college campuses for other approaches to civic learning and democratic engagement, deliberation represents a way to redirect civic initiatives away from a focus on the problems *in* democracy to the problems *of* democracy.

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### Author Biographies



Dr. Carrie B. Kisker is an education research and policy consultant in Los Angeles, California, and a director of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges. She engages in relevant and applicable research pertaining to community college policy and practice, and regularly consults with college leaders on issues related to civic learning and democratic engagement, student outcomes and accountability, student mobility, and strategic planning. Dr. Kisker holds a B.A. in psychology and education from Dartmouth College, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in higher education from the University of California, Los Angeles. She co-wrote *The American Community College* (Jossey-Bass, 2014) with Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer and *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System* (Jossey-Bass, 2010) with Arthur M. Cohen. In 2016, Dr. Kisker and Bernie Ronan edited a *New Directions for Community Colleges* sourcebook on civic learning and democratic engagement.



Dr. John J. Theis is a professor of political science and executive director of the Center for Civic Engagement at the Lone Star College (LSC) System. He also serves as chair of the steering committee of The Democracy Commitment. Involved in civic engagement work for over 20 years, Dr. Theis started the LSC-Kingwood Public Achievement program in 2010 and was one of the founders of the LSC-Kingwood Center for Civic Engagement. He was recently named to lead a system-level civic engagement initiative across the six Lone Star College system campuses. He has received numerous awards and honors, including a nomination for the E.E. Schattschneider Award for Best Dissertation published in the field of American politics, Professor of the Year, the Governor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, Innovator of the Year, and The Rouche Award. Dr. Theis holds a Ph.D. from the University of Arizona.



Alberto R. Olivas is the founding executive director of the Congressman Ed Pastor Center for Politics and Public Service at Arizona State University. He is a frequent collaborator with the Kettering Foundation on research initiatives pertaining to healthy democracy and has provided training and technical assistance on public engagement and deliberative dialogue methods to colleges, universities, and community organizations across the country. His civic leadership roles include service as board secretary for the National Civic League, as jurist for the All-America City Awards competition, and as vice chair of Arizona Town Hall. Mr. Olivas previously served as director of the Center for Civic Participation for the Maricopa Community College District, and has held numerous appointed positions in state government, including director of the Governor's Office of Equal Opportunity, two terms on the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs, and Voter Outreach Director for the Arizona Secretary of State.