

# CONNECTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

Toward Higher Education's  
Democratic Promise

EDITED BY

Amanda Moore McBride  
and Eric Mlyn



Campus Compact

This book offers a much-needed appraisal of two key social change movements within higher education: civic engagement and social innovation. The contributors critically explore the historical and contemporary contexts as well as democratic foundations (or absence thereof) of both approaches. They conclude with a discussion of possible future directions that may make the approaches more effective in fulfilling the broader democratic mission of higher education in the United States. This is an essential resource for those in higher education who wish to promote and advance social change, as it provides an opportunity to critically examine current civic engagement and social innovation approaches and what might be done to best realize their promise through changes in educational processes, pedagogical strategies, evaluation metrics, and outcomes.



**Campus Compact**

89 South Street, Suite 103  
Boston, MA 02111  
<http://compact.org>

Distributed by Stylus Publishing, LLC.

# **Connecting Civic Engagement and Social Innovation**

Campus Compact is a national coalition of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education. Campus Compact publications focus on practical strategies for campuses to put civic education and community engagement into action. Please visit <http://compact.org> for more information.



**Campus Compact**

# Connecting Civic Engagement and Social Innovation

Toward Higher Education's  
Democratic Promise

EDITED BY  
AMANDA MOORE MCBRIDE  
AND ERIC MLYN



**Campus Compact**

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
Distributed by Stylus Publishing, LLC.

COPYRIGHT © 2020 BY CAMPUS COMPACT

Published by Campus Compact  
89 South Street, Suite 103  
Boston, MA 02111

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, recording, and information storage and retrieval, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McBride, Amanda Moore, 1971- editor. | Mlyn, Eric, 1961- editor.

Title: Connecting civic engagement and social innovation: toward higher education's democratic promise / edited by Amanda Moore McBride and Eric Jay Mlyn.

Description: First edition. | Boston, Massachusetts : Campus Compact, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2020008125 | ISBN 9781945459221 (paperback) | ISBN 9781945459214 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781945459238 (ebook) | ISBN 9781945459245 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Education, Higher--Social aspects--United States. | Community and college--United States. | Service learning--United States. | Democracy and education.

Classification: LCC LC191.94 .C65 2020 | DDC 306.43/2--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020008125>

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-21-4 (cloth)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-22-1 (paperback)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-24-5 (library networkable e-edition)

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-23-8 (consumer e-edition)

Printed in the United States of America

All first editions printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39-48 Standard.

Bulk Purchases

Quantity discounts are available for use in workshops and for staff development.

Call 1-800-232-0223

First Edition, 2020

*Eric dedicates this book to the memory of his late wife, Judy Byck, who in her own way was committed every day to making the world a better place.*

*Amanda dedicates this book to the life of her father, Covie Ray Moore, who came to live with her during its writing, reminding her that her interest in innovation came from his persistent entrepreneurial spirit.*



# CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES ix

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS xi

## PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. FRAMING THE ISSUES BETWEEN THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT  
AND SOCIAL INNOVATION MOVEMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION 3  
*Eric Mlyn and Amanda Moore McBride*

## PART TWO: HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

2. SIBLING RIVALS OR KISSING COUSINS?  
Community Engagement, Social Innovation, and Higher Education for  
the Public Good 13  
*David Scobey*
3. DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRATIC JUSTICE  
Lost Compasses for Civic Engagement and Social Innovation 34  
*Caryn McTighe Musil*
4. EXPLORATORY STUDY ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS  
ABOUT SERVICE-LEARNING AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP 55  
*Joan Clifford, David Malone, Amy Anderson, Dane Emmerling, and  
Evan Widney*

## PART THREE: THE ANCHOR INSTITUTION APPROACH

5. CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL  
INNOVATION AS COMPONENTS OF A DEMOCRATIC ANCHOR  
INSTITUTION APPROACH 89  
*Matthew Hartley, Rita A. Hodges, Ira Harkavy, and Joann Weeks*

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, SOCIAL INNOVATION, AND ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS  
A Case Study for Converging Paradigms of Social Justice Education 110  
*Kevin Guerrieri, Sandra Sgoutas-Emch, Chris Nayve, Judith Liu, Juan Carlos Rivas, and Mike Williams*

**PART FOUR: MOVING THE FIELD FORWARD**

7. SOCIAL INNOVATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT  
A Critical Praxis for Engagement in Higher Education 135  
*Cadence Willse, prabhdeep singh kehal, and Mathew B. Johnson*
8. REALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION'S DEMOCRATIC PROMISE  
The Next Chapter for Civic Engagement and Social Innovation 162  
*Amanda Moore McBride and Eric Mlyn*

CONTRIBUTORS 175

INDEX 179

## TABLES AND FIGURES

### TABLES

Table 4.1	Lexicon Used by Campus Compact, the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification, and the Ashoka U Changemaker Campus Designation	59
Table 4.2	Survey Themes and Corresponding Survey Statements	61
Table 4.3	Respondents' Previous Experience and Institutional Affiliation	64
Table 4.4	Statements That All Students Significantly Associated With Service-Learning or Social Entrepreneurship	66
Table 4.5	Statements Not Significantly Associated With Service-Learning or Social Entrepreneurship by All Students	67
Table 4.6	Statements That Students Significantly Associated With Service-Learning or Social Entrepreneurship at Carnegie-and-Ashoka U Institutions and Other Institutions	68
Table 4.7	Statements Not Significantly Associated by Students in Carnegie-and-Ashoka U Institutions or Other Institutions	69
Table 4.8	Word Associations	70
Table 7.1	Number of Identifiable Courses Offered at Ashoka U Institutions in Academic Year 2016–2017	151
Table 7.2	Keywords in Definitions at Ashoka U Institutions in Academic Year 2016–2017	153

### FIGURES

Figure 4.1.	Word clouds of student-constructed definitions.	65
Figure 7.1.	The market-based (top) and public good-based (bottom) trajectories of student engagement.	137



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book comes out of what has been more than a decade-long friendship between the two of us. We first met at a professional conference on civic engagement and realized that we not only had similar interests in how we could move civic engagement in higher education forward but also both loved the Grateful Dead. That was the beginning of a collaboration that has been professionally and personally enriching for both of us. Indeed, what a long strange trip it has been.

From our initial meeting, when Amanda was running civic engagement programs at Washington University of St. Louis and Eric was leading DukeEngage along with other civic initiatives at Duke University, we have pursued our interests in global service-learning. We further collaborated in 2011 on the first meeting of what is now a broad organization on global service-learning that is holding its sixth summit in 2020. We also began musing about the lack of political or democratic thinking in the civic engagement movements in higher education and wrote some short pieces for academic audiences that urged broader approaches to teaching about social change.

This edited volume grew out of a concern that we had about the rise of social entrepreneurship and social innovation on our campuses. It struck us as an important movement, and we wanted to place it in the broader context of how we teach and talk about social change on our campuses. This led to a 2015 think tank on social innovation and civic engagement that brought together practitioners and scholars from these fields. The challenges and synergies identified by the participants convinced us that there was more to be said about these movements, and thus the idea for this book was born.

Eric stepped down from his administrative role at Duke University and plans to return to the classroom. Amanda took on the deanship of the School of Social Work at the University of Denver. We both remain keenly interested in what we see as fundamental issues about how institutions of higher education work to foster and strengthen democracy. We are so pleased that the contributors to this volume have directly addressed this issue and offer creative ideas for pursuing a democratic mission. Given the

current threats to democracy in the United States, we can think of few issues that are more important for our leaders in higher education to address.

## **Eric**

I would like to thank many colleagues at Duke University who listened to my rants and raves about the growth of the social innovation movement. Matt Nash taught me much about this field and welcomed me into the growing social innovation and entrepreneurship initiative at Duke. Other colleagues at Duke who helped with my thinking on this and welcomed conversations over coffee or lunch include Tony Brown, Robert Korstad, and David Malone. I am also grateful to Marina Kim of Ashoka U who invited me into the Ashoka community. Finally, I thank Gary Bennett, Sally Kornbluth, Peter Lange, and Steve Nowicki for encouraging this scholarship and providing the funding for a sabbatical, which allowed for the completion of this project. On that note, I am grateful to colleagues at the Tisch College for Civic Life at Tufts University, in particular Peter Levine and Alan Solomont, who welcomed me as a visiting scholar for the fall of 2019. They have provided a comfortable and stimulating environment in which to finish this project and to think and read.

## **Amanda**

I would like to thank my prior colleagues at Washington University in St. Louis, including Michael Sherraden, former provost Holden Thorp, and former dean Eddie Lawlor. All saw innovation, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement as critical to the mission of higher education, and gave me opportunities to pursue their intersection through research and curricular innovation campus wide. Now at the University of Denver, I am grateful for Chancellor Emerita Rebecca Chopp's vision to advance social innovation for the public good through the founding of Project X-ITE and allowing me to help shape its trajectory. Kimberly Bender, Hope Wisneski, and Trish Becker at the Graduate School of Social Work; Nina Sharma and Marty Katz at Project X-ITE; and JB Holston shared the ride, becoming my thought partners and coconspirators on the disruption so badly needed in higher education.

# PART ONE

---

## INTRODUCTION



## Chapter One

# FRAMING THE ISSUES BETWEEN THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL INNOVATION MOVEMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Eric Mlyn and Amanda Moore McBride*



**A**s we write the first chapter of this book, we ask ourselves, in the words of David Byrne, “Well, how did I get here?” (Talking Heads, 1980). Neither of us thought five years ago when we first published our critiques of the social innovation movement that we would be where we are now, which is right in the middle of the social innovation movements on our respective university campuses. We have moved from critics on the periphery to central players in our campuses’ social innovation efforts. One of us is now a named cochangemaker at Duke University as a university liaison to Ashoka U, and one of us is now dean of a school of social work who is working across schools at the University of Denver to develop the innovation and entrepreneurship center for the university. As we have evolved, we have become acutely aware that so have these movements.

This book is about this evolution, where civic engagement and social innovation have been, where they are now, and where their potential lies. It has been an exciting time for those of us teaching, researching, and running programs in these areas; we welcome this opportunity to take a step back to make meaning of the field. To the extent that we always encourage our students to reflect on their experiences and learning, we welcome the opportunity to do that here with you the reader and our colleagues who have written provocative perspectives on these issues.

In working on this volume, it became evident to us that we need to be clear on the ultimate purpose of the civic engagement and social innovation movements. What are they trying to achieve? We contend that the unifier of these two approaches is betterment of the human condition, improving the social, economic, and political conditions for the majority. *Social change* is often the identified goal and phrase used. As civic engagement scholars, we struggle with this reference because our conception of social change is sometimes too narrowly focused on policy change, a conception with a premise that government may be best equipped to better the human condition at scale. However, we concede that most do use social change as the outcome measure and that we can achieve it in a myriad of ways. In light of this, we are eager to broaden our own conception of the wide variety of mechanisms that citizens use to better the human condition and the role that higher education plays in encouraging, pursuing, and teaching these mechanisms.

As a frame to this book and the contributors' chapters, we begin with the ongoing critiques of both approaches, and then our contributors address specific themes. In Part Two, this volume explores the historical and contemporary context of these approaches. In Part Three, the contexts are embedded in the paradigmatic anchor institution approach. In Part Four, the book offers ways to move the approaches forward. We discuss the democratic foundations (or absence thereof) of both approaches, elaborating on existing critiques and offering new ones. We conclude with possible future directions that may make the approaches more effective for fulfilling the broader democratic mission of U.S. higher education. All of this will outline the issues, not offer up definitive conclusions. We invite you to come to your own conclusions and test them against those we offer in the final chapter. Our hope is that those in higher education who wish to promote and advance social change will critically examine where we are with our civic engagement and social innovation approaches and commit to realizing their promise through changes in our operations and our educational processes, pedagogical strategies, evaluation metrics, and outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

## Evolving Critiques

We maintain some degree of skepticism about the ascendance of the social innovation movement, but we also embrace an openness to its possibilities. Our aim is to be productive in moving the respective civic engagement and social innovation approaches forward. In editing this book, we have also been reminded that the more traditional civic engagement approaches we were raised on suffer from some of the very same critiques that we have leveled at social innovation. We deeply appreciate the wisdom of the profound and simple observation by Nobel Laureate Thomas Schelling (1966) that it is much easier to destroy something than to build it. In the end, the world simply has too many problems and unmet needs for us to pretend that we have a clear view or evidence on the single best approach for achieving social change and how higher education best educates toward that goal. We are grateful to those who have joined us in writing this book—at once being critical and constructive.

Some of our critiques of social innovation have been named previously and remain (McBride & Mlyn, 2015, 2016): Innovation is still much overused, ideas are still prized over execution, and self-confidence is weighted more than community wisdom. These critiques stem at least in part from the deluge of e-mails and talks and colloquia and webinars that seek to push the role of innovation to the forefront of everything we do. In an attempt to “disrupt” and change social conditions, social innovation can sometimes be a false promise, because we risk abandoning the other ways that democracies achieve social change, such as through organizing, voting, and protesting. There can be opportunity costs when our students and citizens more generally become enamored with social innovation while ignoring the politics of our time. As such, social innovation has been unapologetically apolitical, seeking the technical solution, when the social issues it attempts to affect are anything but technical or apolitical. But, and this volume represents an evolution of our thinking, civic engagement as traditionally pursued in higher education has also much of the time been apolitical and not particularly concerned with democracy. An example is that the primary mode of student civic engagement is through volunteering efforts, such as tutoring children or cleaning parks (Mlyn & McBride, 2014).

Those who have contributed to this volume have propelled our thinking on this point, such that we now think there are real possibilities to further develop the social innovation movement to more fully embrace the democratic virtues that are ultimately necessary for impactful and scalable social change. One area where this has become particularly clear to us over

the last four years is in civic tech, where new organizations, websites, and apps reduce the transaction costs of democratic citizenship. Of note here are innovations such as TurboVote, Countable, and VoteWithMe; we are both impressed with the power of technology to enhance our democracy (Civictch, 2019). We will briefly return to these topics in the conclusion.

## Still Needed: Clarification and Grounding

We have written previously on the need to define terms in this social change arena of higher education (McBride & Mlyn, 2016). It does not serve us to be sloppy and nondescript in our language and references, especially as we attempt to build a field. We recognize that definitions are important. Every chapter in this volume defines terms. We are also aware that one could dedicate an entire volume to the various definitions that we use in both civic engagement and social innovation, their historical evolution, and the important implications that result from these definitional choices. We are not going to do that important but enormous task here. Instead, for the purposes of bringing some commonality to our language in this chapter and throughout this volume, we offer this most commonly accepted frame of reference:

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi)

Students can be involved in civic activities through higher education by volunteering, serving internationally, interning for politicians or political organizations, and so on.

The first editor's note of the leading journal *Stanford Social Innovation Review* defined *social innovation* as "the process of inventing, securing support for, and implementing novel solutions to social needs and problems" (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008, p. 36). Like social entrepreneurship, social innovation connotes the development and introduction of something new, but that new thing can be an idea, a device, or a process—not just an enterprise or an organization or a company. The innovation is "social" because it intends to address some pressing problem affecting the human condition. Students can be involved in social innovation efforts in a variety of ways, such as by taking courses, completing internships, working on team projects, participating in competitions, and engaging in a range of other activities.

With this framing of social innovation in mind, we are struck by the sometimes misleading or inappropriate uses of each of the terms. A metaphor about democracy is apt: One cannot help but notice the normative global appeal of the notion of *democracy* and use of the term even by regimes that do not resemble any of our notions of democracy. So, too, do many overstate the social benefits of businesses that were created solely to make a profit. Similarly, the normative appeal of social benefit leads to its evocation to justify massive profit-making companies, such as Airbnb and Uber. Those companies are first and foremost about making money and delivering value for their shareholders, though they often invoke the social benefits of their work, whether framed in terms of impact on the environment or wages. (Perhaps the trust test here is whether any of these companies of the so-called sharing economy would ever sacrifice financial revenue for these broader social causes.) Similarly, we hear things described as innovative that are not. One of us attended a conference some years ago where the creation of the “deconstructed lunch” was heralded as a remarkable innovation that would lessen the environmental impact of the conference. When described, the deconstructed lunch—sans boxes—was not much more than a buffet. The point here is not to be snarky, but instead to emphasize that notions of social innovation are so normatively appealing that they can be overused and verge on becoming meaningless.

We also have mused among ourselves and with other colleagues about why the field of social innovation is ascendant right now. It is clear that so many of today’s entrepreneurs achieved their fame as innovators; here we are thinking of the likes of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, and Jeff Bezos, to name just a few. It is much harder for any of us to name figures from the public and nonprofit sectors who receive the same amount of adulation. In this age of rapid technological growth and innovations, which were simply hard to imagine only a few years ago, it is perhaps only logical that so many would think we can bring the same innovative genius to our attempts to solve hunger, homelessness, and violence. And to be fair, we recognize that many social innovations—from apps that connect excess food at events to populations that need the food to large-scale innovations, such as City Year or Teach for America—have had a real impact in making the world a better place. Of course, it also becomes obvious here that what is innovative at one point in history becomes the standard as time moves on.

As we reflect on our milieu of higher education, the ascendance of social innovation should be viewed as related to broader trends in higher education. The entire higher education industry—both public and private institutions—has embraced neoliberal, market-based strategies, which leaves an embrace of innovation and entrepreneurship as the logical next