



## IN THIS ISSUE

*Essays from:*  
Richard Greenwald

New York | **Campus Compact**

# OCCASIONAL PAPERS

VOL. 5 ISSUE 1

DECEMBER 2011

*The New York Campus Compact Occasional Papers are publications designed to advance an understanding of and appreciation for collegiate civic engagement in its many forms.*

*Occasional Papers will describe promising practices in service learning and civic engagement, and the role of civic engagement programs in fulfilling institutional missions and promoting student learning.*

*Manuscripts are invited that represent the viewpoints and experiences of the variety of individuals who have a stake in civic engagement - presidents, academic administrators, faculty, students, and community partners.*

**Editor's Note:** On November 7, 2011, Richard Greenwald, Professor of History and Social Sciences and Dean of St. Joseph College in New York City published the following piece in *Inside Higher Education*. With his permission, Dean Greenwald's remarks have been published herein as a *New York Campus Compact Occasional Paper*.

## Weaving Colleges Into Communities

*by Richard Greenwald  
St. Joseph College*

▶ The fiscal collapse of 2008 exacerbated a malaise for many of us in colleges and universities. We feel besieged from within and without, as the public seems to have turned against us. Texas A&M University now has done a thorough cost accounting, publicly valuing all faculty in terms of productivity. All over, public spending for higher education is being cut to the bone. There is a revolt against the high tuition at many private universities. And there is the spate of recent books from a cadre of academics themselves who blame the academy for failing in its mission.

Mark Taylor, Andrew Hacker and the recently published book entitled *Academically Adrift* have held up a magical mirror showing higher education's dysfunctional present and a dystopian and unsustainable future, one where students don't learn, more education takes place online than face-to-face, tenure does not exist and many small,

private universities and colleges are gone. The journalist Anya Kamenetz goes one further in her recent book, *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*, when she argues that the university as we know it is obsolete, as a generation of "edupunks" educate themselves.

Under this level of bristling assault, it is easy for academics to bury our heads in the proverbial sand. We have already begun the long slog through the academic year, as our shoulders are against the proverbial wheel. The natural rhythm of the academic calendar tells us we can't relax until we make it through the academic year. But, we no longer have the luxury to wait until summer to recharge and rethink how we make ourselves relevant in a world that seems to no longer respect college.

www.nycampuscompact.org

This crisis is nowhere more marked than in the liberal arts, as we feel particularly vulnerable to market forces and often feel disconnected from social engagement. Some of this is the result of students flocking to majors that they feel offer job opportunities after graduation: business, health-related fields, some of the sciences, technologies, etc. They are not rushing to major in sociology or history. This has caused many of us in the traditional liberal arts to become increasingly defensive and too often derisive of what we label “vocational education.”

We cannot and should not hold our noses or draw lines in the sand because it is a losing battle. We should use the moment to reinvent what we do and reconnect us to the world. We are searching for models that will make us relevant, make sense to the public in this political and economic reality, and better serve our students. And for some of us, this reality has turned us to the past, where we may feel we got things right and had a sense of place. In uncertain times, the past offers us some comfort. Yes, one has to just read the memoirs or biographies of the great academics of the 20th century to realize the past is indeed a foreign land. Some of us might make it to superstar status and enjoy this lost rarified world. Most of us, however, will need to soldier on.

We find ourselves in anxious times because everything we value is now questioned and challenged. This intense scrutiny has caused a crisis of identity for the humanities and social sciences, as more and more the public asks us to justify not just the costs of a liberal arts education but its ultimate value. So we need to truly examine and explain the value of a liberal arts degree and search for ways to become relevant again. We can no longer just say, in a sense, take it because it is good for you and society, as if the liberal arts were some sort of foul medicine that we needed to take but needn't like.

We know this is not the case, but in a market place where families are investing a small fortune for their children's college education, we have to show a tangible return -- by rooting programs in the real world they become more relevant. We need to finally ask who are we in today's crowded and ever-changing

higher education marketplace? How can we get students, employers, legislatures and others to see the liberal arts are not a luxury, but a true necessity? We need to stop telling and start showing. In short, we need to model a new knowledge creation process. We need to live it.

I would suggest that we are witnessing a moment in the history of higher education where what we do now will matter intensely for the future.

This is a moment of formation and transformation, where everything seems to be on the table. Some argue that one model for our salvation might lie, in part, in the past, or the particular example of some golden age, as most of the recent books on the crisis in higher education look romantically at the last 50 years as a sort of last hurrah for a sort of education they saw as ideal in many ways.

This is not the time for us to get dewy-eyed over what is being lost. We need to be pragmatic and embrace the new reality, challenges and all, and find a way forward. This is the exact moment we need to end any notions of the university or college as a protected or safe intellectual zone, one separated from the world. We need to embrace the world we inhabit, with all its complex social problems, and break down what are by now artificial barriers between colleges and universities and the wider world.

Michael Crow, the president at Arizona State University, has challenged all of us to make the “university ... more than a place.” Crow argues that the university needs to be a “force” for change in the world. Maybe many of our campuses can't change the world, but they can engage their communities. Imagine if each of our institutions became a force for change locally. The collective effort could reverberate loudly, providing both support and the tools for a better world. But it could also win over legions of fans who see tangible value from the local college. And, all evidence shows, engaged learning is higher learning. So our students benefit, too.



The current crop of critics are right that we need to rethink our mission, and I applaud them for recognizing the need for change.

Universities need to find ways to foster critical introspection and intellectual growth in the midst of a rapidly changing world. But hasn't that always been the case? Universities are not stagnant institutions. Rather they are organic, breathing in society problems and all. Evidence from *Imagining America*, *Campus Compact*, and *Project Pericles*, among others, suggests that knowledge in motion, or civically engaged learning, creates intensive pathways that reinforce knowledge, creating enhanced learning outcomes. In short, it provides better and deeper educational opportunities for students. Part of a college education must require education that is rooted in society -- even the messiness of it -- not apart from it.

Those of us in position of leadership have a unique challenge. We need to support faculty, provide resources (including “silence and space”), respect governance, and encourage students. But, in the end, we need to lead in this time of great transformation. Each college will need to find its own way. There is no magic, one-size-fits-all bullet to solve the crisis. Using the resources at hand, fostering and nurturing faculty and taking advantage of geography (our space and place in communities) will enable us to move forward.

I am not saying everyone needs to do civic engagement. Surely this is ludicrous, impossible and would have disastrous effects. Rather, I would suggest that in focused and deep ways, colleges develop lasting partnerships within the community. It might mean for one school adopting a school district to improve education for all. Or, for another, researching and developing policy suggestions for environmental impact issues. We have great resources: some of the smartest experts in the nation, an

army of eager students who want to apply their research and a world of problems. Through sustained and meaningful partnerships, colleges can have a positive impact on society.

These efforts will tie colleges more visibility into the world they inhabit. By becoming part of the community fabric they will be viewed as a resource rather than a liability or unknown entity. This alone, however, will not solve our crisis. There will need to be a thorough rethinking of how higher education is financed.

Part of the crisis in the liberal arts is of our own making and we need to recognize our role in it. We have retreated into our disciplines, and subdisciplines, speaking to fewer and fewer people about narrower and narrower topics. We deride public intellectuals as sellouts. We have become, in a word, smug. So, rather than model the university as a modern cloistered haven in a heartless world, let's return to how John Dewey saw it. “Education,” according to Dewey, “is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”

And life should not be lived walled off. By joining the world, combining the classroom and the streets, will we regain our place in the world and better serve our students and teach our students not to be afraid of the world, but to fully inhabit it.

*Richard Greenwald is professor of history and social sciences and dean of St. Joseph College in New York City. His forthcoming book is The Death of 9-5: Permanent Freelancers, Empty Offices and the New Way America Works (Bloomsbury).*



# Donate Today!

## NYCC INNOVATION FUND

The New York Campus Compact (NYCC) Innovative Consortium Fund will support exemplary multi-institution/community projects that require modest investment to sustain implementation. The goals of the NYCC Innovative Consortium Fund are to:

- >> provide financial support to consortia of NYCC member institutions for innovative projects that meet community needs,
- >> support campus-community projects that help to meet the community goals,
- >> advance the community and civic engagement higher education agenda in New York State.

For more information or to donate, go to [nycampuscompact.org](http://nycampuscompact.org)

## SAVE THE DATE

### 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GLOBAL SERVICE LEARNING INSTITUTE

May 31-June 1, 2012 | Ithaca, New York

The Global Service Learning Institute seeks to advance the understanding of global service-learning pedagogy, theory, program models, institutional support and scholarship. GSLI is designed to foster greater collaboration and dialogue among participants who are interested in advancing global service-learning theory and practice.

### 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL EASTERN REGION CAMPUS COMPACT CONFERENCE

October 11-12, 2012 | Dartmouth College | Hanover, New Hampshire

Moving Us Forward: Social Responsibility and Community Impact

The Eastern Region Campus Compact is a coalition of state Campus Compacts from Maine to Florida.

Building Clear Pathways to Civic Engagement

[www.nycampuscompact.org](http://www.nycampuscompact.org)

New York | Campus Compact  
95 Brown Road  
Box 1006  
Ithaca, NY 14850

