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**Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary
of the New York Campus Compact**

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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The New York Campus Compact Occasional Papers are 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 October 28, 2011, the New York Campus Compact celebrated ten years of supporting community engagement at a gala celebration in East Elmhurst, New York. The keynote speaker at the Tenth Anniversary Dinner was Richard Guarasci, President of Wagner College and Professor of Political Science. At Wagner, Guarasci founded The Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts, the four-year curriculum for all undergraduates, which draws together a substantive liberal arts core into a series of learning communities and experiential learning tutorials. President Guarasci served as co-chair of the NYCC Executive Committee from 2004 – 2009. With his permission, President Guarasci's remarks have been published herein as a *New York Campus Compact Occasional Paper*.

The Future of Civic Engagement in an Age of Limits

*By Richard Guarasci,
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▶ The near future of community based learning and civic engagement will be influenced heavily by the dramatic forces reshaping higher education. The global economic crisis has created a highly risk averse climate for students, parents and donors. The higher education business model is essentially a deflating balloon if not a bursting bubble. Public tolerance is withering for increasing tuitions built on either legislative appropriations and student debt to support public colleges and universities, or rising financial aid discounts for private institutions. Legislatures, accreditation agencies, parents and students are demanding demonstrated learning outcomes and reasonable employment prospects. Meanwhile local neighborhoods are spiraling downward from unemployment, income inequality, the shrinking of the social safety net and the despair over declining opportunities and the absence of

hope for a better future. This is the new context facing the civic engagement programs for our colleges and universities.

In the midst of the most significant global economic crisis in more than 80 years, higher education faces an acute crisis of resources, organization and legitimization. Colleges and universities find themselves in a double bind, one external and economic and the other internal and existential. We have entered an age of economic limits, fractured politics, stalemated government and personal fear. How we organize academic and campus life begs an alternative to the very foundation of the prevailing model of higher learning in the United States.

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THE CRISIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is confronted with a series of challenges around access, cost, affordability, learning outcomes and institutional priorities. The core concepts of the prevailing model of higher learning are under acute interrogation including what and how faculty teach, how students learn, how information technology shapes pedagogy and delivery cost, how education is delivered and priced, and how institutions assure successful student learning outcomes and career prospects. Further, a skeptical public requires greater understanding of the achievements and ultimate social value of colleges and universities. The disconnect is a result of the public's general lack of understanding about what higher education does beyond its educational function. Higher education needs to help the public to appreciate how it creates, refines and applies knowledge and how this leads to specific and pragmatic solutions to current problems.

In the midst of these challenges, the traditional college is confronted with a variety of forces that seek to reduce higher learning to merely a simple instrumental equation of virtual time invested in exchange for a quickly earned diploma. Absent any commitment to learning about the breadth and depth of human experience and the natural world, universities and colleges are under growing pressure to reduce higher learning to merely a transaction as opposed to a transformation. From its inception American higher education held a commitment to educating for the development of critical abilities, disciplinary mastery and civic learning necessary to develop the independent minded citizens required for a dynamic republic and a vibrant economy. Now the current critique around affordability carries with it a devaluation of American higher education's historic mission.

Taken as a whole the global economic crisis and the internal challenges to colleges and universities have given birth to the most fundamental crisis in a century. It is a crisis of legitimacy as well as one of the political economy of higher education. And while these dilemmas appear on campus, our local neighborhoods are severely challenged to maintain their potential as successful communities with opportunity, choice and mobility for its residents. In New York City alone 1.6 million people have fallen below the poverty line, roughly 20% of its population (*The New York Times*, 9/22/2011). These are not statistics that will afford a vibrant economy or viable neighborhoods. They promise deteriorating conditions of health, education and commerce. Many lives are unnecessarily shattered and the capacities of too many children are stunted. Just as higher education faces dramatic challenges so do our local neighborhoods, particularly urban ones.

THE FUTURE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We can draw three propositions about the future of civic learning and engagement appropriate for this new moment. First, local communities desperately need an infusion of resources that bring creativity, expertise and labor. Simultaneously, colleges and universities need to demonstrate their value to a skeptical nation and an array of critical stakeholders. The salvation for each may lie in democratic and strategic partnerships where student learning is enhanced, neighborhood development enabled and mutual civic engagement accomplished.

Local neighborhoods possess many assets, not just pathologies, but they need creative solutions and sustainable commitments to achieve genuine progress. My experience tells me that first and foremost they require optimism, vision and hope. So many of the local nonprofit organizations, cultural societies and churches are understaffed and underfunded. They are usually fully engaged in managing the immediate problems. They have less capacity to create strategic plans, productive partnerships and comprehensive neighborhood approaches for overall community development. Local governments, often flailing as they attempt to recover lost resources from state and federal authorities, are unable to adequately assist them with both funds and comprehensive development programs.

Universities hold many of the resources required: expertise, research, leadership and labor. They have many fields dedicated not only to research and discovery but also to applied learning and missions that make claims of service to society. The key to sustainable partnerships does not revolve around a massive infusion of new funds. It does not require the expenditure of additional university resources. Successful partnerships will succeed when we realign existing resources involved in learning, teaching, research, and student life toward our community partners and engage the real world problems that are embedded in the everyday realities of these neighborhoods. We have armies of students and many faculty and staff involved in civic work. The best of it is intentional and strategic when linked to genuine and demonstrable student learning outcomes. We need to add positive community impact to our list of civic learning outcomes.

Secondly, the civic mission of higher education needs to progress beyond the model of service learning and civic engagement to a new pedagogy of community partnerships and civic learning. This is not to diminish the importance of service learning. When done well, it produces important civic experiences and disciplinary learning. Successful service learning results in an increase in student empathy, diversity education, social reciprocity, idealism, problem solving and disciplinary learning. These are very significant outcomes for undergraduate education in particular. Equally, when service learning is organized responsibly, community mem-



bers and organizations likely realize a greater sense of connection across generations, ethnicities and racial divides. They too gain a sense of hope and the possible. These outcomes are no small accomplishments. Collectively over a sustained period of time they help students develop the arts of democracy built around the application of knowledge for public purpose, an understanding of social inequalities in our society, and an introduction to civic engagement and community problem solving. This leads to the development of a civic imagination, a necessary component to the building of what the late Czech leader, Vaclav Havel, believed so critical for emerging democracies, namely civic virtue, independent thought and active citizenship.

The limits of service learning and civic engagement are not insignificant either. Since courses are episodic and temporal, so too is their engagement. Courses end and semesters turn. Students mostly disappear from their semester community commitments. These experiences are more random. They are embedded in courses that are looking for service experiences rather than sustained commitments to a defined set of partners and problems. Service learning is often isolated to specific courses and not connected to sets of courses committed to a neighborhood and an ongoing project engaged from many disciplines simultaneously and serially. In short, the benefits of service learning and civic engagement are very important but limited. Too often they are unconsciously based on an extraction model where the local community once again services the needs of the campus community with modest attention to any sustained and planned commitment to advancing the local community as a whole.

Thirdly, to transcend the limits of service learning and civic engagement the civic mission of higher education must move to a campus-community partnership paradigm. The pedagogy and benefits of curricular based engagement must be retained but organized as part of a larger tapestry of curricular and co-curricular learning experiences founded on democratic community partnerships that produce ongoing community projects. Many disciplines are then connected together across semesters, each contributing in appropriate disciplinary and interdisciplinary modes to continuously engage community in ongoing projects, generated by and with the community partners, to allow for sustained practice of genuine engagement and collaboration. In this model, curriculum is carved from real world problems that are engaged in a palpable interplay of theory and practice. Partnerships deliver learning and leadership among all of its stakeholders, namely students, faculty, staff, community agencies, residents and civic leaders. They hold the possibility of forging a genuine democratic education for all involved, elevating the civic mission of colleges and universities to be richer, deeper and compelling. They hold the promise of greater student disciplinary and civic

learning while increasing the probability of increased community cohesiveness, leadership and progress.

All of this leads me to posit an equation for successful and sustainable civic community-campus partnerships. The necessary condition is that student learning must be enhanced. Without privileging student learning I fear that too many of the campus stakeholders will abandon or dilute their community partnerships when other important internal priorities or leadership changes appear. With student learning at the core of the partnerships, universities are accomplishing their founding, most important and supportable mission. This privileging of student learning protects the partnership. But by itself it is not a sufficient condition for sustainability. Community impact is a requisite outcome and it must be conceived as essential and measurable. Impact becomes an institutional strategic priority.

ADVANCING THE PARTNERSHIP AGENDA

To be successful going forward, civic community-campus partnerships must satisfy four conditions. First, they must be sustainable. This means they must be affordable to the campus especially in this challenging economic environment. To achieve this condition, partnerships must be imagined as not adding expense. They must be based on realigning existing assets with community assets and challenges. What are these assets? Start with aligning the university's teacher education, nursing, pre-med and physicians assistant, and other allied health programs with those community identified priorities in preventive health education, screening and research. Align science and technology curricula with community research and practice. Link the respective social science, humanities and the visual and performing arts to community work. Engage our sizeable schools of business to feature service and field based courses aligned to small business development by helping community partners with market analyses, business plans, inventory controls and investment strategies. Teaching and learning, in and outside the classroom, can be community partnered in any number of appropriate ways. Broaden the reward structure for faculty to include the civic component. Reorient student life towards civic work. Value community involvement within all levels of institutional leadership from the student level up to and including trustees. In short, partnerships need no, or very little, additional funding. They require a reorientation of the campus culture and a realignment of existing university commitments and assets.

Second, as mentioned earlier, student learning needs to be understood by all community and campus stakeholders as critical and primary to ensure long term sustainability.



Third, community impact must become an essential institutional and partnership goal. This means it emerges in annual institutional effectiveness assessments and accreditation self studies. In the Wagner College - Port Richmond (Staten Island, New York City) Partnership, we are moving in this specific direction. Our undergraduate general education and a majority of our departmental curricula incorporate serious commitments to the partnership. They appear in our departmental and institutional mission statements, as well as seriously honored in appointment, renewal, tenure and promotion decisions. Institutional research funds privilege community based research. We are now involved in a significant strategic planning process for the partnership with our community partners to identify those community issues and projects organic to our alignment of joint assets. None of this is easy; but with leadership and resilience at all levels, we move closer to our idea of a generative, meaningful and successful partnership.

Finally, the partnership must be democratic. This will be the acid test. Campus goals and community needs must be understood as intertwined. Leadership must build both professional and personal trust, and then keep at it through thick and thin. When faculty members and students value this work, the chance for success increases exponentially. How to build governance for the partnership is no easy matter. At Wagner, the College initiated the partnership. We are still Wagner centric but fronting this as an issue to be addressed. We must have shared equity in the partnership. The form of governance will relate to functionality and sustainability.

THE ROLE OF CAMPUS COMPACT

The Anchor Institution Task Force under the leadership of Ira Harkavy at the University of Pennsylvania and David Maurresse, President, Marga, Inc., has gathered a number of campuses involved in campus - community partnerships. They have focused on community development from the perspective of those "anchor institutions" embedded in the local urban neighborhoods

including university hospitals, schools of teacher education, and urban planning programs, as well as those anchored corporate, financial, cultural and religious institutions that are place based within these communities. These anchors form the foundation for a fuller partnership with a fuller roster of community stakeholders.

Campus Compact is now joining this effort. They can play a leadership role at the national level and the statewide as well. As the historic founder of the modern movement, reigniting campus civic engagement beginning in the 1980's, Campus Compact has the organizational wherewithal to play an important role as a national anchor. Statewide Compacts can begin to disseminate and refine the partnership model. They can provide vision and narrative for Compact institutions. State Compacts can begin to organize statewide meetings with partnership themes, highlighting best practices and fostering campus affinities.

In addition, State Compacts can advocate with legislative leaders, creating greater awareness of how universities can contribute seriously to economic and community development in communities of need. There is also need for a clearinghouse for assessment and outcomes data. And what would be the effect and power of statewide gatherings of our community partners, sharing lessons learned and advocating for civic learning and democratic partnerships as an affordable means to engage chronic neighborhood challenges in education, health care, economic development through non-partisan solutions?

Ultimately we have a path to retain American higher education's historic commitment to educate generations of informed and engaged democratic citizens through the conjunction of theory and practice, curriculum and engagement, and campus and community. It is in our hands to realize it, and in doing so we may just be identifying a key part of higher education's next step in redefining itself for a new era.

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