

► This Commission knows that in New York there are already 70 college and university presidents supporting greater civic engagement and service learning. We have a wonderful platform to build upon for best practices, scholarship and pedagogy.

You may wish to solicit a working paper from New York Campus Compact or the national Campus Compact on recent trends and data.

When Woodrow Wilson was appointed President of Princeton University in 1902, he delivered an inaugural address entitled “Princeton for the Nation’s Service.” At his inauguration he said: “American universities have a character and service of their own. They are not mere seminaries of scholars...their task is two-fold: the produc-

tion of a great body of informed and thoughtful citizens and the production of a small body of trained scholars and investigators...These two functions are not to be performed separately, but side by side, and are to be informed with one spirit, the spirit of enlightenment, a spirit of learning which is neither superficial nor pedantic, which values life more than it values the mere acquisitions of the mind.”

Those of us in higher education have a great opportunity to contribute to the revitalization of our nation’s civic life. It is my hope that this important Commission can advance ideas to reinforce our progress and lay out an ambitious agenda for the future.

Thank you.

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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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.

Publication guidelines and contact information can be obtained on the New York Campus Compact web site – www.nycc.cornell.edu.

Editor’s Note: On September 11, 2007, President Mark D. Gearan of Hobart and William Smith Colleges delivered a presentation on community service to the members of the Governor’s Commission on Higher Education. With his permission, President Gearan’s remarks have been published herein as a New York Campus Compact Occasional Paper.

Statement to the Governor’s Commission on Higher Education

by Mark D. Gearan
President, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

► **T**o my fellow college and university presidents and friends of higher education, I thank you for your service on this important Commission. I see many members of the New York State Campus Compact – an organization of presidents actively supporting the work of community service and service learning.

My thoughts today are as a college president, a former director of the Peace Corps and board member of the Corporation for National and Community Service which oversees Americorps, Vista, and Learn and Serve. In higher education, I have chaired the national board of Campus Compact and co-chaired New York’s Campus Compact. In addition, I serve as a board member of Points of Light Foundation and Hands On Network.

The Commission meeting today comes at an important time in our nation’s and state’s history. On this anniversary of September 11 and the recent anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Americans – and especially young Americans – are thinking about ways they can make a difference and ways to engage their community.

At this time in the academic year, colleges and universities welcome first-year students as they begin their transition in higher education and opening the doors of opportunity.

And the issue of community service is clearly before the country in this week’s *Time* magazine cover story headlined “The Case for National Service.”

Your hearing also comes at an important time for New York State. With leadership focused on the issues of higher education, enormous possibilities exist for such a vibrant state as well as warning signs that summon us to action.

► The good news, of course, is that the ethic of community service and civic engagement is as old as our nation. Indeed, part of the fabric of our society has been a sense of duty and giving back. From deToqueville’s observation that this was a “nation of joiners,” we have advanced with citizens pitching in to make a difference.

In its annual study of “Volunteering in America,” the Corporation for National and Community Service found that “Today, Americans are making more time to improve their community

through service. In fact, people of all ages are volunteering on college campuses, through religious communities, at schools and in social service organizations in a wide range of volunteer activities. Many volunteers teach and mentor children, help older individuals live independently; and work with communities to recover from hurricanes and other disasters.”

The 2007 study found that 28.8% of the population volunteered throughout the United States. Of that total, hundreds of thousands of college students engage in community service enriched by the curriculum and the reflective component of service learning coursework.

More good news can be found in the survey in the fact that the growth of volunteering from 1974 to 2006 has been primarily driven by three age groups including young adults aged 16 to 19 years old – it has doubled between 1989 and 2006 from 13% to 26% respectively.

Other surveys corroborate this trend. The Higher Education Research Institute found the percentage of entering college students who believe that it is “essential” or “very important” to help others who are in difficulty reached a 25-year high in 2005 and that rate increased slightly in 2006.

I would also argue that more good news exists in the extraordinary history and richness of American higher education. Public and private, four-year and two-year institutions have a unique responsibility for community service and have demonstrated their capacity. Many of our institutions look to their founding missions that identified the public role of their efforts.

Twenty-five years ago, Frank Newman observed that on

many campuses there was a growing sense that what matters in our society is how to advance the private good rather than doing what is right for the public good. With the presidents of Stanford, Brown and Georgetown, Newman started an organization of college and university presidents committed to civic engagement, community service and service learning. Today, more than 1,100 presidents and chancellors are members of Campus Compact, headquartered at Brown University. Six years ago, SUNY Geneseo President Chris Dahl and I started the New York State Campus Compact – one of 31 states with an affiliate. Thanks to President Rawlings’ early support to host our

office in Ithaca and Cornell’s continued commitment, today New York State has 70 active college and university presidents as members – making it the largest state organization in the network.

To be sure, there are many things which college and university presidents can and are doing to advance a greater sense of community service and civic engagement

on their campuses. Presidents have an opportunity to highlight the importance of service and engagement; fund areas of excellence; establish partnerships with local entities; profile students, faculty and staff involved in service; and inform our Boards of Trustees about the critical nature of this work. Presidents can work together to make the case for federal support of civic engagement, and work with accreditation organizations to ensure that community service and service-learning courses are part of the system for review. We can urge the various ranking guides to use community service as a metric -- certainly as worthy as alumni giving percentages in telling prospective students and their families about the culture and values of an institution.

There are policy options for this Commission to consider and I respectfully offer the following:

First, urge the governor to make civic engagement a top state priority. Working with the impressive network of public and private institutions of higher education, summon us to the next level of academic excellence by providing our students with an academically challenging curriculum that fosters service learning. Whether the governor creates a cabinet-level office for civic engagement or not, the ability to highlight the work of students, faculty and staff is essen-

tial at this juncture in the service movement. State awards and recognition for outstanding civic engagement would be a start.

Next, start an annual survey of New York colleges and universities to identify current levels of community service by college students on their campuses. If we measure it, we can improve it.

Third, New York should commit the resources required to advance community service in higher education. In another context, Ernest Boyer said “the most fundamental challenge confronting American higher education is to move from fragmentation to coherence.” So, too, for our work in the community – we need more connections and coordination.

A great platform currently exists but there is a wide variance among institutions. Some have many years of involvement in the community while others are just formalizing their role. A good number of institutions are resourced to staff an office and support the work of community engagement. Many institutions rely on ad hoc, part-time efforts if at all.

It seems to me this is a unique moment - what Malcolm Gladwell would call a “tipping point” – for the Commission to address this fragmentation, build upon the impressive network that currently exists, draw upon the collaborations that are working well and broaden this ethic of service across the state.

With appropriate support, conferences and workshops for faculty, administrators and students could easily be developed to advance best practices, share information and define key issues.

Remember, we are sitting with a generation composed of young Americans that we know are keenly interested in service. We know they are deeply committed to making a difference – but we have not resourced an effort to centralize and coordinate what we know about community service work.

How else could we make a difference in New York State? We could provide funds to help establish an office on every campus charged with the specific focus to foster a healthy interaction between colleges and universities and the surrounding communities; provide support for faculty who wish to do service-learning work and opportunities for collaborative interaction across college campuses in New York State; and provide support for students – scholarships and grants – who wish to integrate service learning/community participation into their program of study.

This kind of coordination and support is critical since we

know that volunteer retention and management are critical for local organizations to maintain stable volunteer bases. Again, the Corporation for National and Community Service study found that one out of every three people who volunteer in a given year do not volunteer the following year. These are statistics for all Americans – not just college students. The study also found that “While the good news is that most volunteers choose to continue volunteering, the dramatic cycle of people in and out of volunteering reinforces the fact that volunteer management is critically important and that creating positive volunteer experiences is key to growing a widespread culture of service.”

At Hobart and William Smith Colleges, I am proud of our Office of Community Engagement and Service Learning and our program entitled “Compass” which guides students along a path of learning and leadership through service to the community. We bring the community into the classroom and the classroom into the community so that students can understand the complex issues of poverty, literacy, hunger, race and the environment. Compass is a developmental process giving students opportunities and support to become engaged in the community in meaningful ways so that when they graduate, being involved in their community is second nature. We start at orientation, and move students along the way – from community service, to civic engagement and leadership. And along the way, they learn skills and assist the community in many ways. As New York searches for ways to keep its college graduates in the state, I would argue that as students come to know, understand and appreciate the community, they will be more likely to stay and commit themselves and their careers to this state.

New York should be known for its community engagement. This is a state of good and caring people. It is a state with cities and towns that have supported and hosted colleges and universities and deserve our support; a state with a vibrant not-for-profit sector that needs our help; and a state that has the potential to provide students with the experience, and the transfer of skills that will result in the increased likelihood of their staying here.

But the sobering reality is that the CNCS survey also found that among the big states, New York falls far behind our counterparts in overall volunteer rates, volunteer hours, volunteer retention rates – and even in the young adult volunteer rates and college student volunteer rates.



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