

A PROMISING  
connection

Increasing College  
Access and Success  
through Civic Engagement



**Campus Compact**

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Campus Compact is a national coalition of nearly 1,200 college and university presidents—representing some 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education.

As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, helps campuses forge effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum.

Campus Compact's membership includes public, private, two- and four-year institutions across the spectrum of higher education. These institutions put into practice the ideal of civic engagement by sharing knowledge and resources with their communities, creating local development initiatives, and supporting service and service-learning efforts in areas such as K-12 education, college access and success, health care, the environment, hunger/homelessness, literacy, and senior services.

Campus Compact comprises a national office based in Boston, MA, and state offices in CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, NH, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI, and WV. For contact and other information, see [www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org).

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Campus Compact

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## EXECUTIVE summary

TWO- AND FOUR-YEAR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ACROSS THE NATION, as well as K-12 schools, are intentionally linking dimensions of civic engagement with learning to educate students for civic life. The benefits of this approach are well understood. Connecting the institutional mission and educational goals of colleges and universities with those of community organizations through thoughtfully designed civic engagement experiences improves student learning outcomes and strengthens the educational, economic, and social assets of colleges and communities alike. What is less broadly known is that these same efforts show potential to enhance students' access to and success in college.

Research demonstrates that connecting the classroom to the community is an effective pedagogical strategy. College students who participate in civic engagement learning activities not only earn higher grade point averages but also have higher retention rates and are more likely to complete their college degree. They also demonstrate improved academic content knowledge, critical thinking skills, written and verbal communication, and leadership skills. Moreover, these students show increased interest in becoming personally and professionally involved in future community enhancement projects.

In addition to helping engage college students in their learning and in their communities, civic engagement involving K-12 students can strengthen the pipeline to colleges and universities and address issues of both college access and student success in college. Through tutoring, mentoring, and other programs, current college students can play a critical role in helping K-12 students prepare for college. In addition, K-12 students who participate in civic engagement (often associated with programs facilitated by college students) are more likely to stay in school, graduate from high school, enroll in college, and earn a college degree. These outcomes improve even more dramatically among student populations that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including students of color and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Given widespread concern about the barriers to success facing these students, this finding is of key importance.

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Civic engagement requires the vision, articulation, and active support of college and university presidents.

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Colleges and universities have much to gain from such results, including students who arrive better prepared to absorb course content; a more diverse student body, which can enhance all students' learning; stronger surrounding communities bolstered by a more educated population; and lower drop-out rates. These benefits, however, can be realized only through strong institutional leadership. Civic engagement requires the vision, articulation, and active support of college and university presidents as well as of faculty, staff, and administrators.

## I. Introduction: A Catalytic Time for Campus Engagement

Time and again, when we have placed our bet for the future on education, we have prospered as a result... That is why, at the start of my administration, I set a goal for America: by 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

—President Barack Obama, July 2009

I call on all Americans to stand up and do what they can to serve their communities, shape our history, and enrich both their own lives and the lives of others across this country.

—President Barack Obama, March 2009

As a nationwide coalition of almost 1,200 college and university presidents dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement, and service-learning in higher education, Campus Compact is steadfast in the belief that every person's access to and success in college sits at the center of the public purposes of higher education.

Never before has there been a more catalytic time for higher education to bring to bear the powerful tool of civic engagement on one of the most challenging issues facing our country—improving college access, retention, and graduation rates, particularly among those who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education.

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Increasing the educational attainment of all student populations is imperative to the future health of American colleges and communities alike.

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Since taking office, President Barack Obama has asked Americans to step up and do many things, but none have been more appropriate for our country's higher education leaders to tackle than these: the dual calls for higher college completion rates and for greater dedication to service. By 2020, President Obama wants America to have the highest proportion of adults with postsecondary education in the world. At the same time, he has called for every American to help solve our nation's most critical problems through service. With

national attention focused on these issues, there has never been a more appropriate time to embrace civic engagement as a fundamental educational tool for increasing college access and success.

Student success through educational achievement and graduation is directly linked to the economic vitality of our communities and our nation. Unfortunately, one-third of all public high school students—and nearly 50% of minorities—fail to graduate with their high school class (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). The drop-out statistics are sobering: 5 out of every 100 White students, 10 out of 100 African American students, 15 out of 100 American Indian students, and 18 out of 100 Hispanic students drop out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Decreasing racial disparities and increasing the educational attainment of all student populations is imperative to the future health of American colleges and communities alike. College

degree attainment levels in the United States are slipping behind those of our peer countries around the world. Just under 40% of the U.S. adult population has a two-year or four-year degree. This is roughly the same proportion of American adults who had a college degree 40 years ago. Of greater concern is that higher education attainment levels are increasing in every industrialized and post-industrialized country in the world except for the United States (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2009), which could have consequences both for the national economy and for our understanding of—and therefore our commitment to—our democracy.

One way to help improve K-12 and higher education completion rates is to engage students more deeply in their learning. The practice of moving theoretical academic content from the lectern to engaged applications has grown significantly at higher education institutions over the past 20 years. This practice has been shown to help campuses fulfill several key goals of higher education, including producing critically, civically, and globally minded graduates who possess problem-solving and leadership abilities. The ultimate result is the sustainment of socially equitable communities as a part of healthy, functioning democratic societies (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007).

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Campus Compact is steadfast in the belief that every person's access to and success in college sits at the center of the public purposes of higher education.

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More recently it has emerged that high-quality civic engagement also increases access and student success, as the research outlined in this paper demonstrates. Many colleges and universities are responding by deliberately tying civic engagement activities into access and success initiatives. Campus Compact's most recent annual member survey revealed that students at the organization's 1,198 member campuses contributed an estimated 366 million hours of service to their communities, worth some \$7.6 billion, through campus-organized programs during the 2008–2009 academic year (Campus Compact, 2009). Many of these hours are spent addressing pressing needs in communities related to access and success, including in programs focusing on K-12 education (reported at 89% of responding campuses), tutoring (82%), mentoring (80%), and reading and writing (78%), as well as initiatives aimed specifically at increasing access to and success in higher education (70%).

This paper has been developed to provide a research-based exploration of the promising connections between civic engagement and college access and success. It offers examples of programs that improve students' access to and success in higher education that can be replicated by institutions across the country. Informed by theory, research, and best practices, it provides recommendations to campus leaders on how to create and sustain effective programs. Finally, it identifies areas where further research and follow-through are needed.

To be clear, this white paper is intended to establish and substantiate the relationship between access, success, and civic engagement in order to provoke interest and encourage greater participation at the presidential level. It is not a meta-analysis of the research, nor a comprehensive review of the literature. It does not examine critical antecedents of inhibited access and limited success that occur on individual, organizational, and societal levels, not the least of

which are dimensions of inequality and oppression. Rather, it seeks to convey the significant potential of civic engagement as a vehicle for academic and community success and offers illustrations of and recommendations for achieving this outcome.

## II. Defining Civic Engagement

Both historical and contemporary higher education writers and researchers have asserted that the primary goal of higher education is to develop civic-minded citizens with the skills and capacities to lead our communities and nation (e.g., Dewey, 1916; Bowen, 1977; Astin, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Hurtado, Engberg, & Ponjuan, 2003). Although definitions of civic engagement within higher education vary by institution, program, and individual, there is no doubt that leveraging civic engagement for the mutual benefit of colleges and communities can be an effective strategy for realizing educational, civic, and economic outcomes.

Campuses have used a variety of terms to describe their civic engagement activities and the ways these activities link to learning. Some of the most widely used are service-learning, community engagement, community-based research, civic education, community experiences, community-based learning, democratic practice, and philanthropy education, not to mention a variety of co-curricular offerings for students. Regardless of the term used, if part of the purpose of the activity is to educate or enhance students' understanding of civic life, the work generally can be referred to as civic engagement.

The idea that higher education institutions are responsible for nurturing the growth and development of citizenship skills is not new. Historically, many colleges were founded on the principle of facilitating civic leadership knowledge and skills (Rudolph, 1990). The system of community colleges grew out of a commitment to the democratic principles of access and opportunity (Cohen & Brawer, 2003); its leaders were philosophically dedicated to the belief that broad engagement of the diverse community will create a strong educational, social, political, and economic fabric.

Dewey (1916) is perhaps the best-known early educator who argued that the academy must be connected to the community for learning to have individual and collective relevance. As Giles and Eyler (1994) highlight, "For Dewey, pedagogy and epistemology were related—his theory of knowledge was related to and derived from his notions of citizenship and democracy" (p. 78). In the same vein, Bowen (1977, p. 49) contended that "higher education should equip students to discover what is right in society as well as what is wrong" in order to become intellectually connected to their communities and to develop the skills and abilities to engage in positive social change.

One of the most studied practices of civic engagement is service-learning. From its beginnings, service-learning has had an intended civic dimension—indeed, many of service-learning's pioneers were motivated by the idea of creating "democratic education" (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz,

1999). Because service-learning has been reasonably well studied, many of the examples here focus on this form of engagement.

Civic engagement might best be defined as having two interdependent dimensions: individual and organizational. The *individual* essence of civic engagement is to create civically minded persons who know how to use their knowledge and skills for community betterment. This could be a student who graduates and develops a neighborhood association for improved safety and reduction of petty crime, or a faculty member with urban planning expertise who creates an asset map of existing community resources for a newly formed neighborhood association.

The *organizational* essence of civic engagement is to create infrastructure (policies, procedures, and programs) that link campuses and communities through reciprocal partnerships. This could be a college center for teaching excellence that provides professional development training on integrating service-learning into the curriculum, or an engineering firm that invites student to pilot test and analyze solar energy cells.

One organizational example of an institutionalized partnership is Georgetown University's Meyers Institute for College Preparation (MICP). MICP is a pre-college academic enrichment program that provides comprehensive support to public middle and high school students in the District of Columbia area to empower them to graduate from high school and succeed in college. MICP adopts students from targeted middle schools, starting in the 7th grade, and supports them through their first year of college.

Since the program began in 1989, 98% of the more than 100 program participants in three classes have graduated from high school. Of the classes graduating in 1995, 2001, and 2005, 85% have graduated from various colleges within five years of enrolling. MICP's work provides strong evidence that consistent, comprehensive, long-term academic support, coupled with parental engagement, can have a significant impact on student success.

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Leveraging civic engagement can be an effective strategy for realizing educational, civic, and economic outcomes.

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## III. Civic Engagement's Role in Improving Success in College

### Defining Student Success

Like civic engagement, student success can be measured and defined through varied lenses. A more traditional perspective of student success is one that looks at students' grade point averages (GPAs), retention (fall-to-fall re-enrollment), and completion (graduation) rates. However, in recent years, measures of student success have come to include cultural competency, communication skills, and critical thinking ability as well, since these skills relate to the student's experience not only in college but also in life beyond the college years. The research cited in this paper focuses on traditional definitions of student success (GPA, retention, graduation);

however, evidence of civic engagement's role in other, broader sets of life skills is noted in other discussions.

### The Intersection of Student Success and College Access/Success

Civic engagement improves student success on a range of important measures. Research indicates that high-quality curricular and co-curricular civic engagement is positively correlated with student success in K-12 schools, community colleges, and public and private four-year colleges and universities (Grantmakers for Education, 2010; Meyer, 2003). Astin (1996) highlights the importance of peer group interaction for college student success and notes that service is one way to develop peer relationships. Astin and Sax (1998) and Vogelgesang, Ikeda, Gilmartin, and Keup (2002) further found that service-learning is positively associated with student retention and the likelihood of completing a degree.

Intentionally designed and well-executed efforts result in increased student learning, retention, and graduation rates. In short, civic engagement works.

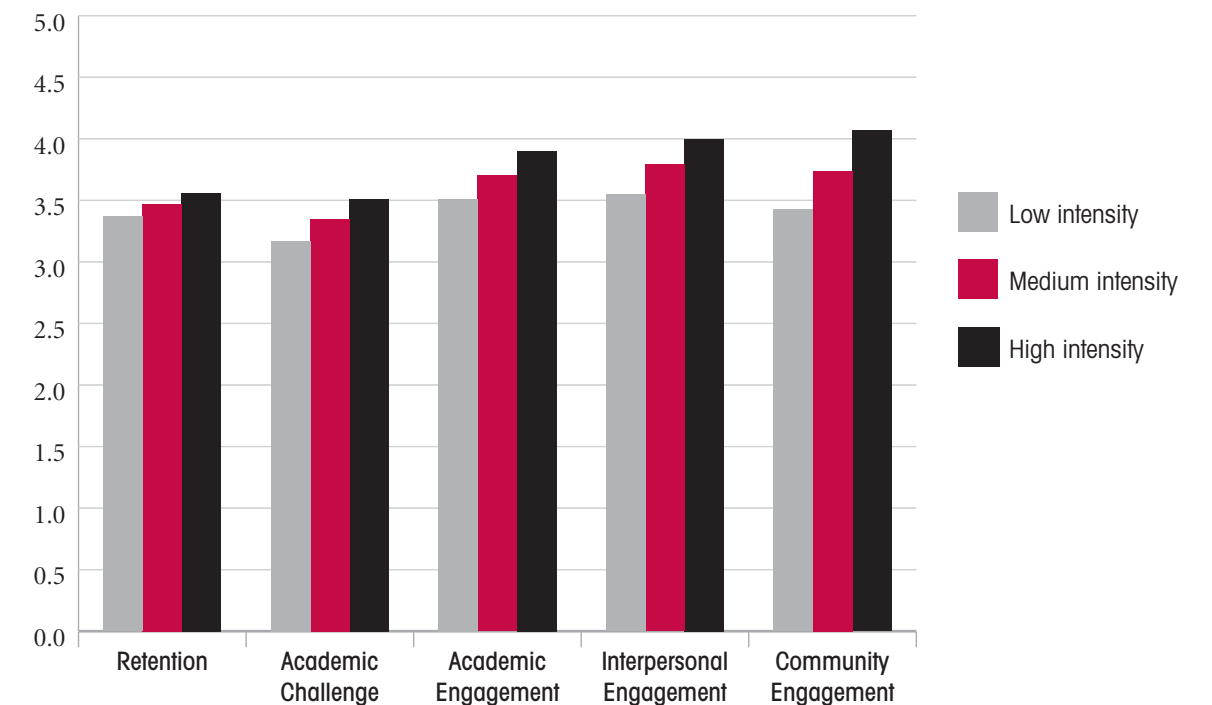
In one study, Gallini and Moely (2003) examined the effects of service-learning on student retention, academic challenge, academic engagement, interpersonal engagement, and community engagement. The researchers surveyed students about their classroom experiences as they related to engagement, academic challenge, and persistence. Students in service-learning courses (n=142) scored significantly higher on all

measures than did students in other courses (n=171). A mediation model showed that academic challenge and academic engagement were the elements of service-learning courses that most influenced students' responses to questions about retention.

In 2010, the state Campus Compact offices of Northern New England conducted a study to replicate and extend Gallini and Moely's findings. Researchers had 770 students at 17 institutions of higher education (including public and private institutions) complete a questionnaire based on Gallini and Moely's that assessed their views of how service-learning affected their academic experience. Students indicated how helpful specific components of their service-learning course were in understanding course content and then answered questions about how their service-learning course affected them on five measures: retention, academic challenge, academic engagement, interpersonal engagement, and community engagement.

Figure 1 shows the mean scores for these five measures based on the intensity of the service-learning in the course, as indicated by the students. Students who engaged in more intensive service-learning experiences scored higher on all five measures than did students who engaged in less intensive service-learning experiences. An analysis of the differences showed that all results were statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). Gallini and Moely's model then was used to test and confirm that service-learning predicts student retention through the mediating effects of academic challenge and academic engagement.

Figure 1: Mean Scores of Students in Low-, Medium-, and High-Intensity Service-Learning Courses on Five Measures of Success



Note: Low intensity indicates that service-learning was a small or non-significant component of the course; medium intensity indicates that service-learning was a significant component of the course; high intensity indicates that service-learning was a major focus of the course.

Source: Campus Compacts of Northern New England.

### A Model of Mentoring Success

While many associate the positive outcomes of mentoring programs with the youth or mentees that are served, research has found that it can also yield positive benefits, such as increased retention and engagement, for the college students who serve as mentors (Gallini & Moely, 2003). Additionally, research has indicated that it is not just the mentoring activities that help engage the college student mentors; group training experiences with peers to prepare for mentoring programs can also yield significant results with regard to student engagement and retention (Astin, 1996).

With most campuses offering programs in which their students serve as mentors to K-12 students, it is important to examine the impact these programs have on college students. The example that follows offers both a model for effective program design and an indication of the results that such a program can achieve.

The Midwest Campus Compact Citizen-Scholar (M3C) Fellowship Program, an AmeriCorps Education Award initiative led by Wisconsin Campus Compact, deliberately employs civic

Nearly 90% of American Indian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students said that they are more likely to complete a college degree after participating in service-learning.

engagement to help students achieve college success. M3C annually enrolls 600 students from 50 different campuses and is committed to integrating education with civic engagement. Of the 600 students, 450 participate as Fellows and 150 participate as Peer Mentors. The Fellows provide direct service in a community-based program and the Peer Mentors support the M3C Fellows. Each student performs 300 hours of service in the local community annually and in return receives a \$1,000 education award to use toward tuition or federally funded student loans. Campuses host a minimum of six members who regularly serve together as a cohort and then meet for reflection about their common service experiences. While the gatherings are designed to focus on the service experiences, the discussions and time together provide a support system for students' larger collegiate experience.

The M3C program has demonstrated measurable success in achieving its goals, which include increasing retention and academic success among first-generation and low-income students. In a study of students enrolled in 2007–2008 comparing M3C Fellows who completed the program with similar students who did not (those eligible for Pell grants), researchers found that the Fellows not only achieved greater academic success but were also more likely to stay in school (Figures 2 and 3).

These findings provide strong evidence of academic success through civic engagement. Several key components of the M3C program reflect effective practices that have contributed to its success:

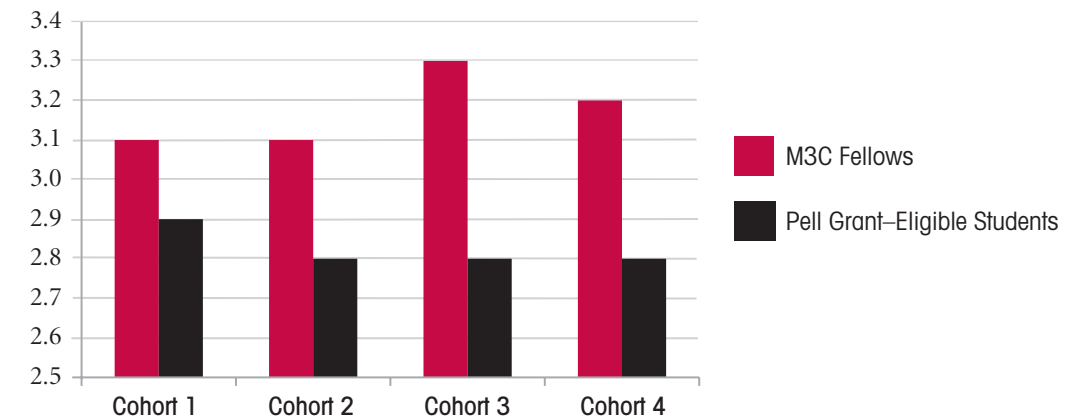
- *The sustained nature of the program.* The 300-hour service requirement provides continual contact and support for the Fellows that cannot be achieved in a one-shot service program.
- *The use of peer mentors.* A great deal has been written about the powerful connections of peer mentors with college student success. The M3C program maximizes its result by adding this component to the program design.
- *Utilization of a cohort model.* There is evidence that cohort models enhance retention because of the support and high engagement it encourages among peers (Teitel, 1997).

Findings from these and similar programs show that intentionally designed and well-executed efforts result in increased student learning, retention, and graduation rates. In short, civic engagement works.

### Successful Community College Models

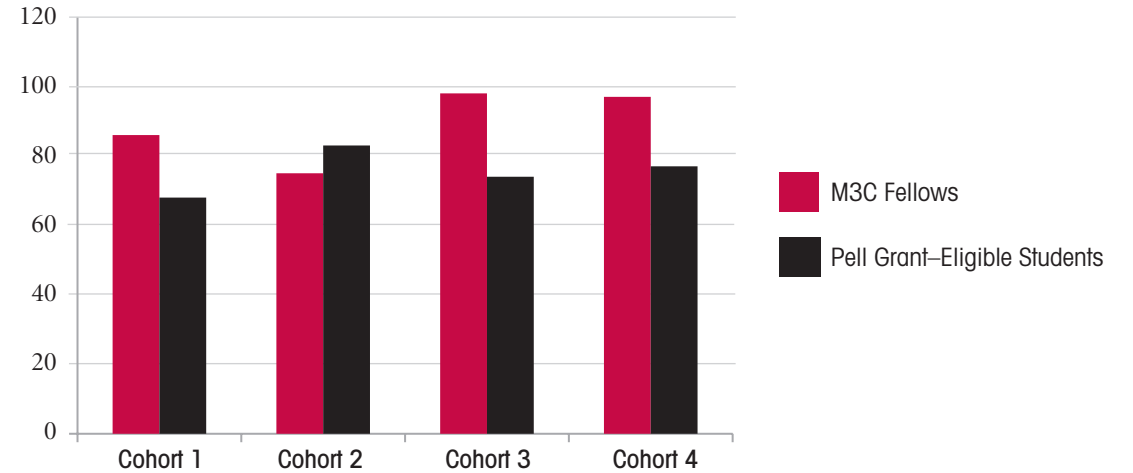
While many of the outcomes linking civic engagement to college access and success can be found at institutions of all types (two-year, four-year, public, private), some organizations have looked specifically at the impact of civic engagement on the success of students at two-year campuses. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has a history of leader-

Figure 2: Grade Point Averages of M3C Fellows and Pell Grant–Eligible Comparison Group



Source: Wisconsin Campus Compact (2010).

Figure 3: Return-to-College Rates for M3C Participants and Pell Grant–Eligible Comparison Group



Source: Wisconsin Campus Compact (2010).

ship in combining community service with academic instruction, focusing on critical, reflective thinking and personal and civic responsibility. In a recent study involving more than 2,000 community college students published by AACC, Prentice and Robinson (2010) found statistically significant differences between service-learners and non-service-learners on five out of six learning outcomes, including educational success and academic development, civic responsibility, critical thinking, communication, and career and teamwork.



One successful model involving both a four-year and a two-year institution is the Dahiwakud Project, developed by the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE) through a grant from the Arizona Community Foundation with assistance from Learn and Serve America Higher Education. In this project, faculty and students from the University of Massachusetts-Lowell provided training and technical assistance and worked with faculty and students at Tohono O’odham Community College to install solar units that provided electricity for families in the Tohono O’odham Nation in Arizona.

College students from both campuses who participated in the service-learning projects evidenced an improved attitude toward learning and greater interest in continuing community service after the project. Students also reported that the service-learning experience had a very positive impact on their academic skills and knowledge, including those related to intercultural competence. Faculty participants reported that the experience not only increased their academic discipline knowledge but also expanded their skill set in terms of research interests, pedagogical teaching strategies, and professional understanding of conservation, sustainability, and indigenous cultures.

Another CCNCCE initiative funded by Learn and Serve America Higher Education, Accent on Student Success: Engaged Together for Service (ASSETS), developed an intergenerational approach to community engagement through service-learning projects. This three-year initiative (2006–2009) brought together baby boomers, K-12 students, and community college students in an effort to promote academic and civic engagement opportunities for disadvantaged youth through service-learning projects focused on homeland security and emergency preparedness.

Survey data from more than 1,500 college students indicate overwhelming success, with nine out of ten students reporting improved attitudes toward academic learning and increased likelihood of becoming involved in future community service work. Perhaps most significantly, nearly 90% of American Indian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students said that they are more likely to complete a college degree after participating in service-learning.

#### **Other Student Outcomes: Personal and Professional Development**

The benefit of civic engagement for college students extends beyond the student and his or her time enrolled in college. Aside from increasing the likelihood that a student will complete college, participation in various civic engagement programs can prepare a student for success beyond the classroom.

Whether it is co-curricular volunteerism or academic service-learning, experience in the community not only enhances academic learning but also directly supports the acquisition of broader life skills needed for effectively transitioning into adult roles and responsibilities (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1999; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005). This includes experience interacting effectively with diverse groups of people as well as acquiring traditional work-related skills. In recent years there has been a significant increase in international service-learning, which provides cross-cultural opportunities to enhance different dimensions of student learning. Some

universities have included the expansion of study-abroad programs in their strategic plans and in their co-curricular programs.

In their extensive review of the literature on service-learning, Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001) found a range of benefits for students:

- As noted by both students and faculty, service-learning has a positive impact on students’ academic learning and on their ability to apply what they have learned in the “real world.”
- Service-learning improves student satisfaction with college, and students engaged in service-learning are more likely to graduate.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on students’ sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, interpersonal development, ability to work well with others, spiritual and moral development, and leadership and communication skills.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on social responsibility and citizenship skills.

Finally, work in the community can give students a leg up in gaining employment after graduation. The 2010 Job Outlook Survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2010) indicated that among other things, a candidate’s involvement in volunteer work was a key factor in making hiring decisions.

## **IV. Engagement and Access: The K-12 Connection**

### **Effects of Civic Engagement on K-12 Success**

The success of K-12 students is important for higher education; it has real consequences for both college access and college preparedness. School districts are increasingly using service-learning and community service as strategies to enhance student learning and engagement and to better prepare students for college. Approximately 974,000 school-age youth participated in Learn and Serve America–funded service-learning activities in the 2008–2009 academic year. These funds supported more than 450 districts and 700 individual schools in service-learning activities across the United States.

Research indicates extremely positive effects from this activity, including increased attendance rates and decreased suspensions (Laird & Black, 2002; Ohlson, 2009); improved GPAs and academic engagement (Billig, 2007; Kraft & Wheeler, 2003); enhanced sense of self (McGuire & Gamble, 2006); enhanced social consciousness (Furco, 2002); and facilitation of the transition to adulthood (Martin, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Crossley, 2006). Research by Scales and Roehlkepartain (2005) determined that low-income students who participated in service-learning increased their academic achievement over their non-participating peers. Melchior and Bailis (2002) found that the impact of service-learning was greater for lower-income, minority, and at-risk youths.

Nine out of ten youths reported that as a result of engaging in service-learning activities, they have a better understanding of how a college education can help their future.

As Gent (2007) argues, service-learning is one way to ensure that no child is left behind. Evidence in support of this view is plentiful. In one study, 70% of surveyed students who dropped out of high school reported that they did not see the real-world applications of their schoolwork (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

In one nationally representative survey of 807 high school students, including 151 at-risk students, more than 80% noted that their chances of graduating would increase if schools provided opportunities for real-world learning such as service-learning (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). As one student who had participated in service-learning stated, “Service-learning motivates me to keep on going and to not be afraid to try new things.” Other survey findings included the following:

- 65% of students said their motivation would increase if classes connected learning with opportunities to serve in communities.
- 74% of African American and 70% of Hispanic students responded that service-learning could have a big effect on keeping students in school.
- 90% of African American, 83% of Hispanic, and 81% of White students said they would enroll in service-learning classes if offered at their school.
- At low-performing schools, only 8% of students said their school offers service-learning courses (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008).

Accessing a college education necessitates academic preparation (e.g., skill development in appropriate high school courses), as well as understanding the policies and practices of application for admission and financial aid. One effort to aid in preparation is the California Campus Compact Youth-to-College Initiative, which engaged college students and more than 2,500 youths from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations in service-learning activities.

By pairing college and high school service-learning outreach to maximize access to higher education, this initiative achieved outstanding results. Nine out of ten youths reported that as a result of engaging in service-learning activities, they have a better understanding of how a college education can help their future (Cress, Stokamer, & Drummond Hays, 2010). Nearly 90% said that they are more inclined to pursue and earn their college degree (Table 1). In addition, nearly three-fourths reported that they now know which high school classes to take to prepare them for college, how to use their high school experiences to prepare for college, and how to apply for college admission and financial aid. Among underrepresented groups, 79% of Black/African American youths strongly agreed that they now are more likely to go to college in the future, and two-thirds of American Indian and Hispanic/Latino youths strongly agreed that they know more about how a college education can benefit them.

Table 1: Impact of Service-Learning on Likelihood of Going to College

“As a result of participating in this service-learning experience, I have an increased likelihood of going to college in the future.”

Answer Options	Youth Participants (n=2,481)
Strongly Disagree	4.7%
Somewhat Disagree	5.9%
Somewhat Agree	22.8%
Strongly Agree	66.7%

Source: Cress, Stokamer, & Drummond Hays (2010).

### The Role of Current College Students in Increasing Access

One of the interesting opportunities created by connecting the need for college access and success with campus civic engagement efforts is that college students can serve in critical roles to help K-12 students prepare for college while gaining experience through civic engagement. Although not yet extensively studied, these programs may have an even stronger effect on the success of students already in college, since civic and service work has been found to bolster their commitment to attaining a degree.

Several strong examples have emerged among state Campus Compacts in the past several years. Washington Campus Compact’s Retention Project is a college-based mentoring program that utilizes service-learning as a strategy to prepare low-income students for college, including improving the retention of first-generation college students and promoting the academic advancement of disadvantaged and non-traditional college, high school, and middle school students. With support from the Lumina Foundation for Education–funded KnowHow2GO project, this program has had impressive results. During the 2006–2009 program years, 81% of the 6,000 youth served in grades 6-12 reported improved attitudes toward academic achievement, and 83% expressed an interest in attending postsecondary education.

Michigan Campus Compact’s Investing in College Futures program, funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service Learn and Serve America program and the McGregor Foundation, provided campuses with resources to connect service and service-learning to issues of college access in Michigan communities. After three years of seeding programs across the state, Michigan served nearly 6,000 disadvantaged youth. Surveys of participants found:

- 49.1% of youths reported that their participation in the program increased their success in school.
- 64.5% of youths reported that the program increased their interest in going to college.

- 96.8% of participating college students reported a strong desire to continue in college after participating in the project—a desire that was borne out in practice, as the retention rate among participating students was 92%, compared with the average institutional retention rate of 78%.

Campus Compact for New Hampshire is tackling a critical component of college access and success: the need for students aspiring to college to take rigorous courses, thus becoming better academically prepared for college and for developing the skills required for the 21st century. The NH Scholars program, run in conjunction with New Hampshire College and University Council, prepares high school students for college-level work and reduces the need for remediation.

The program addresses a serious need: nationally, as many as 40% of students take at least one remedial class during their college years (College Board, 2010), and New Hampshire annually loses \$8 million as a result of remediation at the community college level (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Results from the 32 high schools participating in this program are still being analyzed, but initial reports from one high school show that in 2007–2008 academic year the

program doubled enrollment in chemistry, tripled enrollment in college preparatory physics, and increased enrollment in foreign languages by 25%.

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“Service-learning motivates me to keep on going and to not be afraid to try new things.”

—High school student

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Students, faculty, and institutions can serve many populations and address a wide variety of needs by working on the issue of college access. College students can tutor or mentor younger students, recent immigrants, or displaced workers; develop a variety

of materials and public service messages; or work with schools, nonprofits, or governments to develop programs or policy changes. Faculty can approach the issue from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives—not only education and sociology, but also areas such as graphic arts, web design, journalism, statistics, and economics. For example, science faculty may partner with K-12 schools to strengthen science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, to name just one example. The college access issue provides a broad venue to recruit college students and faculty to engage in civic engagement work.

## V. Maximizing the Effects of Civic Engagement

Reaping the benefits of civic engagement relies on creating high-quality experiences for both higher education institutions and their community partners. While the role of the faculty and the community are key to ensuring the effectiveness of civic engagement efforts, institutional readiness for this work—including adequate fiscal support—can significantly impact the ability of faculty and community partners to deliver high-quality programs. The literature on effective practices in civic engagement (e.g., Keeling, 2004; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996) demonstrates the importance of collaboration between curricular and co-curricular leadership within the institution. These collaborations include not just pro-

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Higher education leaders can use their influence to create a culture of engagement that will benefit students, faculty, and communities.

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gram delivery but also strategic planning, co-reporting, and infrastructure development in both academic and student affairs.

Another key element to success is allowing students to take the lead in civic engagement activities. This helps them develop both their civic and their leadership skills. Student-driven programs have had impressive

results: coalitions of students have created national movements to address issues such as access to higher education, and even led to the development of national human rights groups such as United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS).

### Civic Engagement and Faculty

One of the major contributing factors to academic success for college students is their relationship with faculty (Astin, 1993); this is especially true for students of color and those from underrepresented populations (Cress, 2008; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nagda et al., 1998). In service-learning and civic engagement activities, a positive student-faculty relationship is strongly associated with student growth in intellectual and academic capacities as well as being predictive of future civic involvement.

For example, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that closeness to faculty in service-learning was a key variable that influenced many of the critical thinking outcomes for students. In a national comparative study of community service and service-learning, Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) found that service-learning contributed to GPA, writing skills, and critical thinking over and above community service that was not connected to a course.

In another national longitudinal study, Astin, Vogelgesang, and their colleagues at UCLA (2006) found that six years after graduation, several key post-college civic engagement outcomes (civic leadership, charitable giving, and political engagement) were related to service-learning, particularly when students had discussed their service experiences with a faculty member. Indeed, there appears to be a direct and statistically significant correlation between faculty engagement in civic-minded teaching and research practices (e.g., integrating community engagement into courses; using scholarship to address community needs) and student ability to utilize complex thinking to understand a diverse society (Hurtado, 2010).

In a national survey of 22,500 faculty, nearly 90% agreed that colleges have a responsibility to work with their surrounding communities to address local issues. The same proportion agreed that colleges should encourage students to be involved in community engagement activities (HERI, 2009). In a survey of 2,500 faculty in the western region, Washington Campus Compact (2009) found that one-third of respondents wanted to learn more about service-learning and close to half wanted to learn more about community-based research. In addition, Campus Compact’s national membership surveys over the years indicate increased faculty utilization of service-learning (Campus Compact, 2009).

Given the important role that faculty play with regard to student achievement, research on faculty involvement in service-learning courses (Antonio, Astin & Cress, 2000) and efforts to support faculty civic engagement practices is crucial for future student access and success. As Schnaubelt and Statham (2007) emphasize, utilizing service-learning as an effective pedagogical tool for academic learning is predicated upon creating a professional culture of engaged teaching and scholarship among faculty.

A vital dimension for integrating and sustaining a faculty culture of engagement is to link institutional missions with promotion and tenure policies that support and reward engaged scholarship (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). In their national study of factors that influence faculty engaged scholarship, Vogelgesang, Denson, and Jayakumar (2010) found that faculty perceptions of institutional commitment to engagement was a major determinant of faculty involvement over and above individual characteristics.

### Civic Engagement and Institutions

Institutions can and do engage in many simultaneous efforts to increase student success. Many of these efforts can be developed or enhanced through civic engagement initiatives. In a recent update of their 1991 encyclopedic review of the research on factors leading to student success, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found numerous success predictors that are strongly related to civic engagement efforts. For example, among the interventions that contribute to persistence are academic advising, counseling, and summer bridge programs. Other key predictors of persistence include interaction with faculty members and peers as well as participation in learning communities.

Research on college student success outcomes in relation to civic engagement includes studies of academic engagement, participation in student groups, connections to residence hall programs, student leadership, and service-learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Additional research has indicated that mentor training and collaborative activities provide peer-group interaction that is critical to student educational success (Astin, 1996; Braxton, 2000). Moreover, mentoring through service-learning activities directly improves student retention and academic engagement (Gallini & Moely, 2003).

Numerous researchers have found that service-learning initiatives create the potential for increasing diverse student access and success and are an effective pedagogical technique for addressing equity in educational achievement (Cress, 2006; Cress, Collier, & Reitenaur, 2005; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2005). As Pascarella and Terenzini conclude in their chapter on educational attainment and persistence, “The evidence consistently indicates that academic and social involvement in whatever form (but some more than others) exert statistically significant and positive net influences on student persistence and degree completion” (2005, p. 44).

### Civic Engagement and Community Impact

Many would argue that paying attention to the community is a moral demand, given that we partner with community agencies to provide learning arenas for our students through service-learning and a host of other community-based experiences. However, beyond a moral argument, there is evidence that developing strong partnerships with the community is important

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Students say that service-learning increases their belief that they can make a difference in their communities and enhances their leadership skills.

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for the sake of student learning. For example, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that “Community voice, where students felt that the work they did was shaped by input from the community, did predict that students would feel more connected to the community” (p. 47).

Students have indicated that service-learning increases their belief that they can make a difference in their communities (Eyler & Giles, 1994; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000; Moely et al., 2002; Gallini & Moely, 2003) and enhances their leadership skills (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Moely et al., 2002). The broader implications of academic engagement in the community—such as students making connections between

coursework and community issues, seeing themselves as having community leadership capacity, and identifying themselves as future agents of positive community change—are critical to the success of neighborhoods and communities across the country and around the globe (Battistoni, 1997; Hepburn, 1997; Cress, Yamashita, Duarte, & Burns, 2010; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003).

In “Where’s the Community in Service-Learning Research?” Cruz and Giles (2000) note that given the difficulty—both methodologically and financially—of studying community-wide outcomes, it is more realistic to focus on community partnerships as the unit of analysis. This approach has been adopted in a number of studies. Bell-Elkins (2002) studied one community-campus partnership in depth utilizing Community-Campus Partnerships for Health’s “Principles of Good Practice for Community-Campus Partnerships.” The study measured the impact of an exemplary partnership that was able to move from a single issue to a broad-based group that developed new collaborative procedures and changed both town ordinances and university policies to increase the quality of life for the entire community.

Similarly, Dorado and Giles (2004) examined 13 service-learning partnerships in New England, focusing on the stages of engagement that occur over time. The terms of measurement included the *tentative*, *aligned*, and *committed* stages of partnerships. Each stage calls for a certain set of behaviors; those partnerships that reach the committed stage have a shared view of, and commitment to, student learning and service outcomes.

In another analysis of the same data, Dorado, Giles, and Welch (2008) examined the role of faculty in partnerships, in the context of whether there was a service-learning staff person to coordinate the partnership (*delegated* partnerships) or the faculty member was involved in developing and sustaining the partnership (*undelegated* partnerships). The analysis found that delegated partnerships—those with coordinators who focused exclusively on coordination and played no role in program participation—are likely to produce pre-defined outcomes, while undelegated partnerships are likely to produce co-defined outcomes (outcomes defined by, and tailored to the needs of, both partners). Thus, faculty play a key role in community partnerships as they do in student learning.

Building on Dorado and Giles, and also using partnerships as the unit of analysis, Phillips examined the role of reciprocity in creating partnerships that transform community and higher education partners. Reciprocity was crucial; elements that contributed to a truly transformational relationship included consistency in relationships and community-campus fusion (Phillips, 2007; Phillips & Ward, 2009).

While community research in service-learning and civic engagement is still largely a neglected area, more studies are emerging on community partnerships. For example, one recent book (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009) takes a critical perspective on the benefits of partnerships for community organizations and credits as the impetus for the study Cruz and Giles' (2000) call to conduct more community research and to use the partnership as the unit of analysis.

### Enhancing Community-Campus Connections for Access and Success

Civic engagement takes the work of many to fully actualize its potential, and it can be overwhelming to know where to start in the process. With these issues in mind, below are five essential areas in which higher education leaders can use their influence to create a culture of engagement that will benefit students, faculty, and communities alike.

1. Connect civic engagement with institutional mission and vision statements.
  - Create an institutional culture of civic engagement through written and oral statements.
  - Create a teaching and learning expectation for campus-community connections by recognizing the achievements of students, staff, and faculty involved in civic engagement.
2. Integrate civic engagement at all academic and co-curricular levels: technical education, general education, academic major, graduate/professional training, and student affairs.
  - Create civic engagement learning objectives in courses, minors, and majors.
  - Create co-curricular opportunities through student leadership groups and activities.
3. Integrate civic engagement into the faculty promotion and reward structure.
  - Create hiring, promotion, reward, and advancement criteria consistent with the scholarship of teaching and the scholarship of engagement.
  - Create support structures for generating teaching and learning grants relating to civic engagement.
4. Provide professional and pedagogical development opportunities for civically engaged faculty.
  - Create teaching excellence centers that offer frequent workshops, trainings, and ongoing support for integrating civic engagement into the curriculum.

- Work with academic disciplines and professional associations to focus on disseminating the best scholarship, teaching, and practices of civic engagement.
5. Provide infrastructure support for generating and sustaining community-campus relationships.
    - Create a civic engagement center that can provide logistical and technical support for curricular and co-curricular civic engagement activities.
    - Create an institutional-community network or advisory group focused on long-term, reciprocal campus-community partnerships.
    - Develop measures to evaluate the community impact of this work.
    - Create structures that support seamless collaboration between curricular and co-curricular initiatives.

## VI. Moving Forward through Research

There is a need for further research that can inform institutional practice and deepen understanding of the possibilities and limits of civic engagement as a strategy for producing benefits beyond improving student learning and civic outcomes—and in particular for increasing college access and success. Several general areas warrant attention:

- *The link between civic engagement and student access to and success in college.* Not until recently have some civic engagement programs been designed with student retention and success as an outcome. Research is needed to understand more about the impact of these programs on students, taking into account different student groups, institutional settings, and program variation.
- *The role of institutional context.* Hollander and Burack (2009) write, “We now must ask what are the different models of civic engagement that are actively being promoted by higher education institutions, and how can we ascertain the variable impact of these different models? What we still need to identify are the academic and co-curricular elements that most impact student civic engagement and long-term commitment to civic engagement.” This includes a range of experiences, including, for example, international service-learning, year-long participatory action research projects, and graduate service-learning programs.
- *The process of civic engagement.* We have tended to study outcomes rather than the process of transformation. We need to redirect our focus from studying instrumental activities like voting to researching individual civic transformation and the development of a sense of civic and personal efficacy. We also need to better understand the developmental experiences and interactions (e.g., teacher and youth; peers, youth, and family;

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We have tended to study outcomes rather than the process of transformation.

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youth and organizations) that influence the efficacy of civic teaching and learning. This requires a more holistic look at what experiences in K-12 schools, colleges, and students' lives are shaping their civic engagement. How does service tie into their conception of what they want to do? What is the connection between civic experiences and life goals? Between the student and the institution?

- *The impact of civic engagement on those served.* The bulk of literature related to service-learning and college access focuses on service-learners rather than on the young people they serve. This is a serious gap in the literature that calls for future studies in this specific area. For example, Schmidt, Marks, and Derrico (2004) recommend service-learning to engage college students, having found that college mentors in one study experienced positive results, but they do not report how service-learning affected the at-risk fourth graders the college students mentored. Similarly, Cashel, Goodman and Swanson (2003) found that youth mentored by service-learning undergraduates were satisfied with their experience but otherwise focused on the college mentors. As Collins, Weinbaum, Ramón, and Vaughan (2009) lament, there is a dearth of literature directly connecting K-12, college, and community impact involving service-learning partnerships and the enhancement of access and retention for youth.

## VII. Moving Forward through Practice: Recommendations for Presidents and Other Campus Leaders

Research has shown that quality community engagement can yield positive results for students, faculty, community partners, and higher education institutions. The operative word is *quality*. Quality community engagement requires leadership, planning, support, and evaluation.

This section outlines actions campus leaders can take to increase college access and success through civic engagement. These recommendations are based on the research and effective practices presented in this paper. Additional ways that campuses can encourage and support and work in specific areas can be found in the Appendix of this document.

Following are seven steps for assuming leadership in improving college access and success:

1. Begin by getting key campus leaders talking to one another. One possibility is to convene a meeting between those supporting civic engagement and those engaged in access and success initiatives to discuss relevant research, the needs of each department or program, and possible collaborations.
2. Find ways to encourage faculty to look for civic learning opportunities that engage students in meaningful and quality community work.
3. Bring together local groups working on access issues in your community and look for ways your campus can support their work.
4. Enlist the support of development office staff to pursue grant funds to support innovative undergraduate retention strategies, or create new development revenues by appeal-

ing to donors committed to the institutional mission of a civically engaged college or university.

5. Start tracking and evaluating civic engagement activities on your campus in relationship to success indicators. Determine whether current institutional data-gathering efforts allow for reporting on the relationship between service-learning and student retention and success.
6. Ensure that an institutional commitment to civic engagement is reflected in the faculty review process, including promotion and tenure/contract renewal policies. Because service-learning and engaged scholarship are mission-driven, they should not be simply allowed or tolerated but explicitly valued and rewarded.
7. Share evaluation and data analysis results with key institutional and community stakeholders in order to celebrate successes and improve quality.

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Quality community engagement requires leadership, planning, support, and evaluation.

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## VIII. Conclusion

This paper provides an overview of the connections between civic engagement and college access and success. The findings described here demonstrate promising associations between meaningful civic engagement efforts and increased access to higher education. These findings also demonstrate that quality civic engagement efforts can enhance academic success among both current college students and the K-12 students who will make up tomorrow's college population.

Overall, the research and illustrations cited here provide a compelling case for higher education leaders throughout the country to commit to a shared leadership action agenda that focuses on promoting meaningful civic engagement as a powerful tool for increasing both access to and success in college.

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## Appendix: Additional Actions for Improving Access and Success through Engagement

Following are specific recommendations for enhancing campus-community connections, including actions to strengthen students, faculty, community partnerships, service-learning, and other important elements that contribute to college access and success.

### Strengthening students:

- Institute a set of specific learning outcomes for graduation that must be met through significant community engagement experiences.
- Increase service-learning and community engagement opportunities beyond the one-course, one-semester model. Look for opportunities to build in longer-term projects, team-based interdisciplinary experiences, and community-based research projects in order to deepen learning and involvement.
- Allow for more integration of service-learning into student support services (e.g., career offices) and co-curricular opportunities (e.g., internships, co-ops).
- Create opportunities for students to share their work, especially the academic dimensions (e.g., undergraduate research conferences).
- Provide leadership opportunities for students in program development and evaluation.
- Create residence-based living and learning communities that advance engagement projects and research.
- Develop advanced engagement research experiences within existing discipline-based living and learning experiences.

### Strengthening faculty:

- Ensure that an institutional commitment to civic engagement is reflected in the faculty review process, including promotion and tenure/contract renewal policies.
- Provide resources for course development and support (including release time, teaching assistants, etc.).
- Communicate the importance of civic engagement to faculty candidates as part of the advertising, interviewing, hiring, and review processes.
- Provide time in the formal orientation of new faculty for an overview of civic engagement, including service-learning course development, campus resources, and services available from the service-learning or civic engagement office. Provide an opportunity to meet service-learning staff and community members who have a history of active partnership.
- Include service-learning and community engagement in faculty development efforts around teaching and engaged scholarship.

- Provide specific resources for faculty development in this area, including stipends, outside speakers, and conference/travel money.

#### **Strengthening community partnerships:**

- Provide infrastructure support for generating and sustaining community-campus relationships. This is usually done through an office or center dedicated to community engagement.
- Recognize that in general, community partners are invested in student learning and other potential collaborations with their higher education partner.
- Ask community partners to contribute their knowledge and expertise to student assessment efforts, planning, and program development.
- Develop opportunities for community members to co-teach or co-facilitate with members of the college or university.
- Undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the partnership and the impact of engagement efforts on the community.

#### **Supporting the institutional mission:**

- Articulate the connection between service-learning and institutional mission and vision statements.
- Integrate service-learning at all academic levels: technical education, general education, academic major, and graduate/professional training.
- Regard service-learning as a high-impact strategy; pay attention to its role in retention and success.

#### **Supporting service-learning and community engagement:**

- Support an office/center with a professional faculty or staff coordinator to manage use of resources, evaluate outcomes, ensure compliance with the mission, and support students, faculty, and community partners.
- Recognize that community engagement can happen in multiple ways—courses, internships, undergraduate research experiences, experiential learning, living and learning communities, and more. Explore a range of opportunities for service-learning both inside and outside the classroom, including online learning.
- Enlist the support of Development Office staff to pursue grant funds to support innovative undergraduate retention strategies, including service-learning and community engagement.
- Develop infrastructure that encourages curricular and co-curricular collaboration on civic engagement.
- Create new development revenues by appealing to donors committed to the institutional mission of a civically engaged college or university.

#### **Ensuring quality:**

- Determine whether current institutional data-gathering efforts allow for reporting on the relationship between service-learning and student retention and success.
- Encourage departments/majors to identify civic competencies and to include measurements of student achievement of those competencies in assessment efforts.
- Share evaluation and data analysis results with key institutional and community stakeholders in order to celebrate successes and improve quality.

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### About This Publication

Campus Compact has been aware for some time of the connection between campus-based civic engagement efforts and college access and success. In recent years, national interest in programs that support this connection has grown as evidence has mounted that such programs can have a major impact on students' access to, and success in, college.

In response to demand from higher education leaders for an evidence-based assessment of this issue, Campus Compact commissioned a group of nationally known experts to create a white paper summarizing what we know from research and practice about the potential of civic engagement to improve college access and success. To our knowledge, this is the first paper to delineate the intersection of civic engagement and access/success efforts, coalesce the research regarding these two important higher education initiatives, and discuss what still needs to be known.

With support from Lumina Foundation for Education, Campus Compact also created a national forum for discussing this critical issue as part of its Presidents' Leadership Summit, held in October 2010.

### About Campus Compact

Campus Compact is a national coalition of nearly 1,200 college and university presidents—representing some 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education.

As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, helps campuses forge effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum.

Campus Compact's membership includes public, private, two- and four-year institutions across the spectrum of higher education. These institutions put into practice the ideal of civic engagement by sharing knowledge and resources with their communities, creating local development initiatives, and supporting service and service-learning efforts in areas such as K-12 education, college access and success, health care, the environment, hunger/ homelessness, literacy, and senior services.

Campus Compact comprises a national office based in Boston, MA, and state offices in CA, CO, CT, FL, HI, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, NH, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI, and WV. For contact and other information, see [www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org).



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