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Change

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***Evaluating
Undergraduate
Teaching***

by Carl Wieman

***Beyond FAFSA
Completion***

*by Ben Castleman
and Lindsay Page*

farms built on former Indian land). College officers used “land grants and leases to tap into the wealth being generated in the unfree agricultural economies” (p. 117), while the “bonds and mortgages” used by colleges “to secure their cash assets” had slave owners “at the other end” (p. 117). College boards rented land to “slaveholding tenants” and “regularly appealed to local officials, colonial governors, and the crown for land,” both for building their schools and “to ensure a steady annual income” (pp. 118–119).

Nor did colleges keep slaveholding at arm’s length. It was not uncommon for college students, alumni, governors (trustees) and presidents to own slaves (including eight presidents of Princeton in its first 75 years) in a society in which many considered “mastery as a measure of wealth” (p. 119).

The second part of *Ebony & Ivy*, entitled “Race and the Rise of the American College,” pivots to the ways in which slavery influenced the development of intellectual cultures in early America. We learn in Chapter 5 about the continuing dispossession and growing distrust of Indians as the 18th century progressed, especially in the context of Pontiac’s Rebellion, the French-Indian War, and the Revolution. This was accompanied by the “evapora[tion]” (p. 162) of the early colleges’ aspirations to offer education to Indians and the development of various “rationalizations[s]” (p. 177) for the decline of Indian sovereignty and people.

Chapter 6 brings us to the academy’s role in the development and refinement of ideas that supported American territorial expansion, in particular racial theories that “tied the social fates of different populations to perceived natural capacities” (p. 182). Scholars catalogued, collected, exhibited, and synthesized observations and specimens as evidence of natural variation (Thomas Jefferson cited David Hume on “the intellectual inferiority of the Negro”—p. 192).

Indeed, anatomists even robbed graves (often of the poor and people of color) for bodies to use for comparative study and medical research. By the end of the 18th century, Wilder writes, “Science had generated a world of myths about [Indian and African] bodies,” including for the latter measurements of genital excess that “reinforced notions of African primitivism” (p. 209). A lengthy examination of a famous paternity case in Chapter 7 illustrates that by the early 19th century, science in America (especially race science) had achieved a level of authority and prestige that privileged it over religion in regard to critical legal questions and contributed subsequently to the “dissociation of the academy and the church” (p. 221).

Academics’ roles in debates about the new country’s citizenry in the wake of the Revolution and the religious movement known as the Second Great Awakening are the focus of Chapter 8. While there was increasing critique of slavery, abolitionism on campus (and elsewhere) was held back by racial theories that contributed to discomfort with the idea of a multiracial society.

“The intellectual cultures of the United States contained little space for the possibility of a heterogeneous society” while “the imagined divisions between people became more

fixed and less permeable with time” (p. 264). Indian removal from the South was paralleled by the growth of societies for the removal of free blacks to Africa (“colonization”), and “scholars claimed a new public role as racial guardians of the United States” (p. 273).

Ebony & Ivy ends with a dark epilogue about the efforts of the Northern elite to cleanse “the stain of slavery from the story of its prosperity” and “recast their enslavement of Africans into a tale of decorative servitude” (p. 280). Needless to say the role that slavery played in underwriting the economies and institutions of the Northern states was also forgotten in the colleges that educated the sons of the elite—and, as many readers of *Change* will be able to attest, it was certainly not passed on to subsequent generations as a teachable part of the high school and college curriculum.

Ebony & Ivy is, indeed, an uncomfortable book on many levels. Some unease pertains to the argument: It’s not always clear that the portraits, anecdotes, and incidents related add up to the many pungent generalizations that I’ve provided a sampling of here; the colleges themselves slip in and out of view; insufficient attention is paid to the differing interests and views of people in different institutions and roles; and one misses a clear delineation of the clash of alternative voices in the debates around race and slavery in 17th-, 18th-, and early 19th-century America.

There’s also, of course, the subject matter itself—race and slavery—and the immensity of human loss and suffering experienced by Indians and Africans during this long era of American history. That early American colleges and universities depended on, benefitted from, and contributed to these tragedies is itself a hard truth that we must thank Craig Steven Wilder for bringing so memorably to our attention.

It is not really a surprise that early American colleges served the society that supported and sustained them. Yet how admirable is it to serve a society whose elite (the very ones who founded, led, funded, and attended the colleges) played key roles in the brutalities of the time? There is no good answer to this question, I suspect, except to say that it is a vitally important one to keep asking.

Certainly, there’s an argument here for institutions to cultivate the kind of “critical consciousness” alluded to by contributors in *The Relevance of Higher Education*. Yet how should this be done? The classical curriculum studied in early American colleges was clearly not taught in the spirit of a social and political critique of slavery—although after the revolution, Jefferson was concerned to cultivate republican as opposed to aristocratic sensibilities. Similarly without frank acknowledgement of the moral dilemmas involved in serving a society as wealthy and powerful as our own today, a curriculum based solely on Western ideals seems unlikely to adequately equip students with the eyes, will, and know-how for the vigilance and imagination that they will need in working towards a more just society. □

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PERSPECTIVES

“HAPPY GRADUATION. NOW WHAT?”

From Citizen Students to Citizen Alums

By Julie Ellison

A collection of cards on display in June 2012 at a bookstore near Columbia University shows the depth of our discomfort with college graduation. These cards deliver messages from a sardonic parent addressing a graduating daughter or son: “This diploma represents the completion of your degree. It also marks the beginning of your student loan repayment. This is far from over.” “Happy Graduation IOU.... Void when you start contributing to society.” “You now owe your parents \$114,291.56. Plus books. Congratulations grad.” Or, most succinctly, “Happy graduation. Now what?”

We are in a period of acutely felt inequality in our major institutions, including colleges and workplaces. Frustrating job searches and high educational debt pinch recent graduates and their families. For those finishing college during and in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, finding a job has been harrowing. We voice high hopes for the new graduates even as we worry about their chances of success. Our skepticism is reflected in the notion of a new “precariat” (a concept introduced by British economist Guy Standing); Lauren Berlant’s exploration of “cruel optimism”; correspondence from lenders looking for the first loan payment; or news of persistent under-employment.

Alumni are crabby about the unrelenting barrage of solicitations as the distinction between alumni relations and institutional advancement blurs. Capital campaigns are an institutional survival tactic in the face of radically reduced public funding for strapped universities, as well as rallying points for committed alumni of means. But these campaigns

reinforce the perception of higher education as a private good partially supported by a minority of highly valued alumni.

There are only a few available alumni identities—the donor, the sports fan, the networker, the person who goes on the cruise, and—maybe—the student mentor. What can we offer to alumni who hunger for a different kind of relationship with the college? Just as we have challenged assumptions about the meaning of *studenthood* (See Lloyd Thacker’s *College Unranked*), we are long overdue for a more capacious definition of *alumnihood*.

US colleges and universities are getting better at graduating community-oriented, socially responsive students. Recent grads around the country point to moments when a new sense of being an active citizen opened up new conceptions of *graduateness*.

“What can we offer to alumni who hunger for a different kind of relationship with the college?”

Julie Ellison, professor of American Culture and English at the University of Michigan, is founding director emerita of Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life. She now leads Citizen Alum, a multi-institutional network of colleges and universities. She is working on her fourth book, Lyric Citizenship.

A college's civic impact can flow through the distributed agency of former students in the places where they live and work.

THE NEW ALUMNI

Noelle Johnson was a public achievement (PA) democracy coach and program coordinator as an undergrad at Western Kentucky State University. She recalls that “my big start” was working with a faculty mentor, Paul Markham (now with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). Markham invited her into leadership roles; she responded by organizing the first national meeting of democracy coaches.

Noelle is currently a graduate student in the sustainable communities program at Northern Arizona University. She coordinates PA at sites in Flagstaff while nurturing a national network of PA coaches who meet each year at the American Democracy Project conference.

Peter Erkkila, a recent Minnesota graduate, talks about his decisive collegiate experience: a credit-bearing internship through his political science major, which led him to a student organization that encouraged legislative activism on behalf of higher education in Minnesota. This became a pathway to Erkkila's post-graduate work, first as an organizer for a political-action committee supportive of Minnesota universities, UMN-PAC, and currently as Greater Minnesota organizer for the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group.

Delro Cornelius Harris speaks of his experience as an entertainment professional who started his Detroit-based business, Alter Ego Management, in the extended period between his third and fourth years of college. He considers undergraduate education not a script for success (“graduate and make so much money”) but rather as “something that enhanced my experience in terms of the work that I [was already] doing around my passions.” This resistance to normative scripts shapes Harris's alumni engagement priorities now.

Erica Lehrer directs the Center for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence at Concordia University in Montreal. “What I had been looking for in my first post-college decade,” she told me,

was a way to share [with current students at Grinnell] my excitement about the professionalization experiences I was undergoing, and to share the wisdom I was gaining (and the challenges I was facing) on my path to becoming an anthropologist, documentarian, and

“culture broker” trying to forge a different kind of path through the academy as publicly engaged scholars.

Graduates like these are pioneering a new type of conversation between alumni and the colleges they attended. As Erkkila puts it, there is a “gap between what [former students] are able, willing, and eager to do and what the institution says an alum is.” How can we de-monetize our relationship to our graduates, who may nod in recognition as they read Ted Gup's indignant “horror story” of alumni relations (*The Chronicle Review*, 4/11/14)?

As part of the larger movement for democratic renewal in American life described by Peter Levine in *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (2013), we are seeing change efforts by, for, and with civically engaged alumni. If we think more expansively about our former students—across lifelong arcs of space and time—we can see that a college's civic impact can flow through the distributed agency of former students in the places where they live and work.

We have spent the last two decades building the educational infrastructure for “citizen students”: community-engaged majors, minors, certificate programs, community residencies, international experiences, service-learning courses, and internships. The faculty and staff organizers of these programs have a lively interest in the impact of publicly purposeful learning opportunities on graduates. A number of studies are underway to document that impact.

THE NEW ALUMNI RELATIONS

But relationships matter as much as research results. The first place to look for the infrastructure needed to sustain the civic capacity of college graduates is on campus. “Alumni listening projects,” crafted by teams at a number of institutions, are building relationships with “citizen alums” by “engaging people as active creators of stories,” in the words of Mark Wilson, founder of the Living Democracy Program at Auburn University. These projects restore connections to former students and reveal new alumni aspirations and identities. Listening projects also lay the foundation for subsequent efforts to connect campus programs to specific places or organizations where alums are already located.

Truly bi-directional connections will require changes in the field of alumni relations. Professionals in these roles, notes Reichley in his study of the field, face “a difficult fight against impersonality in what was supposed to be a highly personal endeavor.” As people who think of themselves above all as relationship-builders, they find themselves responding to “ever greater demands for efficiency and evaluation,” including increasing demands for fundraising.

Despite these pressures, alumni-relations offices can become resources for civic engagement. Staff members can claim the role of civic professionals who serve the university's public mission. After all, they already respond to the

hunger to reconnect with people and place—why not connect more people, in more diverse roles, in more places, for civic reasons?

We need to get beyond the tokenism and the momentary feel-good payoff of the standard alumni association day of service. St. Catherine University in the Twin Cities is showing the way. Its day of service—Katie Day—has grown to include ties to several courses and to community partnerships sustained throughout the academic year.

Another practical step would be to think differently about who knows what about publicly engaged alumni. Advancement offices identify alumni “prospects.” Alumni relations staff have the ability to locate and communicate with graduates. Faculty, too, have sustained relationships with graduates. Faculty could gather, manage, and share information, and use it to build alliances between academic units and graduates pursuing lives as civic professionals.

There are significant benefits for current students in this approach. For some socially committed experiential-learning programs, the first alumni cohort includes the very students who lobbied for and helped to design the program in the first place. Those graduates are responding to invitations to serve as allies in education. They have important stories to tell and skills to share with current students.

These publicly active alums are also entering into cross-cohort relationships in order to support students through the college-to-work transition. Students who have moved from a two-year to a four-year institution can serve as alumni mentors to those following the same route.

We know that our students aspire to work that pays and matters. Work that matters is a particular priority for those who, as college students, had “positive experiences of communities' civic agency as well as their own” (Wilson). Publicly active graduates are looking for post-college identities consistent with the civic learning they pursued as students.

The Citizen Alum initiative, a network of teams at over 30 campuses, aims to “counter the image of alumni as primarily ‘donors’ with a vision of them as also ‘doers.’” Based at the University of Michigan, the organization grew out of two questions: How can colleges and universities educate graduates who are active citizens in their workplaces and communities? And how can they do this in collaboration with alumni themselves? Citizen Alum supports campus efforts to deepen institutional cultures of engagement by involving graduates and those on campus who work with them.

Citizen Alum teams are showing remarkable creativity in building bridges between publicly engaged students and alumni networks. After forming an inclusive campus team, the sole requirement for Citizen Alum members is to undertake an alumni listening project—an effort to hear, learn from, and act in concert with publicly engaged alumni. Taken together, these projects form a national effort to change the story about changing the world.

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The community-arts practitioners in Ashe' College Unbound held public reflective performances about their experience as that program's first graduating cohort. The University of La Verne's alumni-listening project has put fifty vignettes of citizen alums on the University website. Behind that web page is an archive of information-rich transcribed interviews.

At Auburn, students studying in the Living Democracy curriculum interview citizen alums and write brief articles about them. At Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis, undergraduates in Professor Danielle Hinrichs' Citizen Alum course module also interview engaged alumni, transcribe the interviews, and write papers about the experience.

Citizen Alum has recently launched a national task force on intergenerational learning for college students, chaired by Professor Hinrichs. Campuses from the University of Hawai'i—Manoa to Kennesaw State University in Georgia and points between are moving beyond listening to action: curricular design; joint projects that connect alumni and campus programs around various issues; and, at my home campus of the University of Michigan, research about the civic creativity of alumni undertaken with alumni collaborators.

The organizing unit of Citizen Alum is the campus team, which brings together both the usual civic-engagement suspects and people from units that are rarely at the table when the institution's public mission is addressed. This approach is a form of internal community organizing, as alumni join campus colleagues working in alumni relations, development offices, advising, and career services, along with those from academic and outreach programs. Thanks to participants in programs like these and others—including a Kettering Foundation-funded project on civically engaged alumni—we are gaining a new understanding of turning points in the public lives of our graduates.

Moving forward, colleges need to do three things: 1) encourage the civic life choices of current students; 2) see and value their public-minded alums for reasons other than fundraising; and 3) strengthen communities by identifying ways to support the situated lives of publicly active graduates who reside in them. ☐