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When asked to present the keynote address to this conference on “Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies,” I candidly must confess I was perplexed as to what to say. After all, despite my administrative engagement with campus curricular issues and the American Humanics national program, my career has been on the periphery of yours. My knowledge of your field, despite the kind accolades incorporated in Robert Ashcraft’s introduction, pales in comparison to yours – irrespective of whether you are a scholar, a practitioner, or an engaged student.

Benchmark 3 is a signal event – the decennial gathering of an emerging profession. It is a sincere honor to be asked to participate. I have chosen to share with you first, my reflections on your work and on the movement you have engendered – reflections from one vitally interested in nonprofit and philanthropic studies, but whose perspectives grounded in higher education administration. Secondly, I would like to provide, again from my unorthodox vantage point, personal observations on the monumental challenge to sustain and hopefully strengthen our democracy; and lastly, to describe the intersection of these two movements and in ways to dream about the future.

Twenty-five years ago, when I first learned about the tenuous ties between higher education and the practice of youth and human services, the latter had no academic home – or if one existed, it was truly well hidden. Finding a collegiate home for an American Humanics program was a daunting task. To some it was an offshoot of recreational and physical education studies; to others it properly belonged in management and business studies, albeit as a subset of a subset. Others argued for a home within social work and human development studies. The campus majority, truth be told, saw it as an extracurricular program best housed outside the academic structure – most likely within the confines of student affairs programming.

To me one of the most striking developments of the past quarter century has been the maturation of nonprofit management education into an incipient field of study, carved from several supporting disciplines, bolstered by scholarly studies, enriched by university and foundation support, and embraced by a growing number of practitioners who now increasingly identify with a profession as opposed to solely identifying with their employing agency.

Yet, as we are all aware: the journey is not complete. This interdisciplinary field is still in transition. It has achieved a degree of legitimacy largely through the work of centers and multidisciplinary institutes and through conferences such as this one. The growth of the American Humanics university affiliations from 13 to over 70 campuses has helped to generate both a notable growth in the number of students preparing for nonprofit careers, and strengthened engagement between higher education and community agencies and their professional and lay leadership.

On most campuses, nevertheless, the field of nonprofit studies has yet to be accorded full membership in the pantheon of academic disciplines. But it is coming. Those of us who work in the academy respect its conservative nature, yet chafe at the difficulty of effecting change.

Many of you have heard about the 16th century physician who found himself in a 21st century medical center – and was totally lost, while the 16th century professor, placed in the midst of a contemporary university – in just a week felt right at home.

While change does occur in the academy, it is slow – but more importantly, it percolates rather than drips. The progress you have made in defining your field and according it status has resulted from decisions made at the operational level, institution by institution. While presidential or provostial support is significant, the field evolves not from edict, but from professional activity. Continue your good work: expand scholarly study, cultivate student interest, enlist lay and professional leadership in promoting workforce preparation and continuing education and develop networks of professional activity. Once a toehold is established, expansion can come quickly. Nothing motivates the academy more than a sense that peers at another university are moving into a new field or a discipline.

Others far more knowledgeable than I can better define what constitutes an academic discipline. I but offer a simplistic perspective. I believe four ingredients are necessary for a field of study and practice to be viewed as a disciplinary or interdisciplinary profession: namely, a body of practitioners identifying with the profession; the development of a curriculum and continuing education program for practitioners; an intellectual resource base which studies the field and its programmatic and policy components; and lastly, a widely-acknowledged code of ethics applicable to patrons, professors and practitioners alike. Work to achieve excellence in all four of these dimensions.

If nonprofit studies are in ascendancy, the civic engagement of our fellow citizens is in decline. Few issues should concern us more than the disengagement by Americans from public policy discussion and electoral participation. The withdrawal by many fellow citizens from their civic responsibilities is deeply troubling and, if not renewed, does not portend well for the future of our democracy. Because of that concern, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the association I head, has undertaken a major initiative, the American Democracy Project. Over 200 public colleges and universities have embraced this initiative and committed human and fiscal resources to address the declining participation of our fellow citizens in electoral participation and community building.

How has civic engagement declined? Much has been written and a bevy of studies conducted to document this disengagement. I will not repeat much with which you are familiar – but I do want to focus on two sets of data. First, recently released information indicates that in the presidential election of 2004, the banner year for electoral participation, 60% of eligible voters actually voted – or put another way, 4 out of every 10 eligible voters chose not to become engaged in a truly consequential election. Among

18-29 year olds, the voting age group upon which we in higher education have the greatest impact, only 52% (barely more than half) went to the polls. The second set of data refers to the 2000 and 2002 national elections. (A corresponding breakdown for the 2004 election has not yet been uncovered.) In both earlier elections the proportion of college students and college graduates aged 18-29 who voted was less than the proportion of high school dropouts aged 65 and older. Think about that. Those who are at our universities or who have been there the last 10 years go to the polls in fewer numbers than the elderly with limited schooling.

This data provide all the explanation needed to understand why the Congress often disregards the interests and needs of college students – not increasing the size of Pell grants, raising student loan interest rates, and imposing more fees on college students, while those same representatives won't touch Social Security or in any way reduce benefits to the elderly. Elected officials fear the wrath only from those who vote.

I think we in higher education need to shoulder some of the responsibility for declining electoral participation. As Amy Kass, senior fellow at the University of Chicago's Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy, recently observed:

“By birth or naturalization we receive the privilege of citizenship, but not its reality. True citizenship requires knowing what citizenship means, what it entails, and how best to practice it. But such knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices have to be taught, in class or outside of class. But classrooms help.”

We educators have for much of the last three decades ignored civic education – or perhaps accorded it benign neglect. Secondary school civics has not commanded serious attention, and has often been assigned to athletic coaches with primary interests elsewhere. Nor has there been focused attention to the skills and knowledge referenced by Dr. Kass.

Analysis, synthesis, logical reasoning, recognizing fallacies and sophistry – skills needed to evaluate political advertisements and media sound bites – are rarely addressed in secondary or higher education. A recent public survey demonstrated an alarming ignorance among young voters about the provisions of the Bill of Rights. I would venture to say that at least a third of us in this room cannot enumerate all five freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment.

Whether it be in the classroom, in residence halls, campus assemblies or activities beyond campus walls, I believe that higher education has a responsibility to enunciate, discuss and promote values essential to sustain our democracy. I recognize that there are dangers in assuming this responsibility. We cannot be a tool of governmental propaganda; we must avoid partisanship; we must respect individual rights; and we will need to recognize that libertarians oppose any effort to promote the authority of the state. At the same time, we are stewards of our democracy – and we have the responsibility to sustain and renew it.

I recall the great historian Edward Gibbon's observations on the demise of Athenian Democracy:

“In the end,” Gibbon wrote, “the Athenians more than they wanted freedom, they wanted security. They wanted a comfortable life, and they lost it all – security, comfort, freedom.”

“When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society, but for society to give to them, when the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility – then Athens ceased to be free.”

Helping students understand their responsibilities as citizens is our responsibility. And those responsibilities extend beyond public policy and electoral participation; it extends to civic engagement and to the building of community.

Jane Eisner, a Philadelphia journalist, a syndicated columnist and a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, recently offered some poignant observations:

“A 30 year, well-documented decline in civic education in and out of the classroom has left many in this generation ill-informed of the role and accomplishments of government, and ill-versed in the skills of citizenship. So they [our young people] direct their considerable civic energies into community service, believing that personal intervention will solve community problems more effectively than casting a lone vote on Election Day. For many, service has become the new politics.”

I believe Jane Eisner is on target. Civic responsibility is a two-headed coin: on one side is community service and on the other is electoral participation. Our challenge is to pursue both goals. But who or what in our society should assume the responsibility for studying and promoting civic engagement?

As you undoubtedly know, I believe that one locus of responsibility – and perhaps the primary locus – should be our colleges and universities. And if so, is there a logical place for focusing this responsibility? All of which brings me back to your emerging field of study – the world of Nonprofit Studies.

But before we go there – I need to share a concern about what is happening to our social and economic structure.

I believe all here are familiar with Robert Putnam’s work, *Bowling Alone*, and the forceful commentary he provides in chronicling the decline of that sense of community which long characterized and undergirded our democracy. In recent years, declining citizen participation in communal activities has been accompanied by a renewed segregation of our populace. This segregation is built not so much around race or ethnicity, but reflects economic class distinctions. More so than any period in the last half century, Americans engage in self-segregation based upon economic privilege. Skewed wealth distribution – made more acute by so-called tax relief legislation – determines not only where people live, but with whom they associate and under what settings.

The halcyon days (or at least as we wish to remember them) of rich and poor seated side by side whether at a New England town meeting, a political rally, a baseball game, or a PTA meeting, no longer occur. Economic classes rarely intermingle. The well-to-do in my part of the country send their children to private, not public, schools; political rallies focus on fund-raising with stiff price tags for admission; the well-to-do view sporting events from luxury suites with the less educated in the left-field stands. The military draft is gone. Citizens don’t go to war shoulder to shoulder with fellow citizens: we now build our services primarily from the ranks of the financially induced. While in earlier years, those financially able enjoyed the privileges of wealth with their economic counterparts at country clubs or on cruises, the major change is that today class segregation is the rule, not the exception.

There is one place, however, that has become more class integrated rather than class segregated: the contemporary university. And while there have been and remain pockets of class segregation, in the main we are part of an enterprise that has become more inclusive, more conscious of diversity, more committed to eliminating rather than constructing financial barriers, and where for many of our students interaction with those of significantly different economic means is a new life experience – and hopefully not their last. It is ironic that the university, the creature of the elite in earlier years, has been transformed into the great bastion of access and opportunity.

Yet, even with a heterogeneous student body, we at the university remain isolated from an economic stratum which rarely is present on the campus. Those of you whose work and scholarship is built around youth and human services, who actively pursue community engagement, truly know society. In the past few decades, when service learning achieved greater significance and stature in university life, society came to value it both for its educational benefits and the social good it advances. But in a broader sense service learning helps build social cohesion. We engage citizens in working with others, and for many it is their first meaningful engagement with people who are different. The issue of difference or diversity is of interest to all societies, but a critical issue in a democracy. For there to be consent of the governed, a democracy must find and periodically reaffirm that delicate balance between majority rule and minority rights. The process of achieving that social equilibrium, as Iraq so painfully reinforces, cannot succeed if people do not know or respect their fellow citizens, if there not a genuine sense of community.

Somehow, we need to reintegrate society – to bring together all segments, all classes – and in the process rediscover our common values and interests and simultaneously, soften our differences. Much of that challenge falls elsewhere in society – particularly in Washington and state capitals. Our country would welcome greater harmony, and surely, society would benefit from better policies.

However, those of us on campuses do not have our hands tied. We can develop teaching modules and learning experiences which help integrate social classes, emphasize community development, promote public service, and encourage electoral participation, while extolling civic engagement as a personal responsibility for each of us.

In my four decades in university work, my cup truly “runneth over” with a multitude of treasurable moments. But, honestly, the most heartwarming and the most fulfilling are those occasions when I have seen individual students empowered to achieve self-fulfillment. An idealistic spirit and an altruistic disposition are ever present. Your work in kindling that spirit, instilling confidence, and in lending a helping hand, is what truly counts. Through your work students can make a difference.

At the same time, more scholarly analyses of this burgeoning field is needed and awaited. Is there empirical evidence of what initial preparation results in the most effective nonprofit leadership and management? We all hail the contributions of nonprofit organizations to American society, but do we have a reliable sense of how our society would function if there were far fewer nonprofits?

These are truly exciting times for both scholars and practitioners of nonprofit studies. The field is being defined and you are there.

The question I raise is whether the field, acting autonomously or in concert with colleagues in other disciplines and departments, can define and implement the pedagogy of preparing our students to be engaged citizens. Civic engagement, neither as a field of study nor as an instructional or experiential program, has an accepted home in the university. Its institutional locus varies from one campus to another. It is too important to long remain unclaimed.

Achieving change in the university is, as I earlier observed, considerably difficult. Territorial issues abound and intramural politics can at times be vicious. In times of stress I recall the words of the late, great philosopher Jerry Garcia, who said, "Somebody had to do something. And it is incredibly pathetic that it had to be us."

Well, friends, it has to be us. No president, no provost, no Board of Trustees or Regents, certainly no one on high in the Nation's capital, will magically announce "We have a new discipline." The field of Nonprofit Studies will gain traction in the university setting when you say it is so – and the more frequently those stentorian announcements are made on as many different campuses as is feasible, the more effective you will be.

As you are aware, non-governmental organizations are expanding worldwide. Nonprofit education is gaining currency with colleagues far beyond our shores. Your movement is becoming international well.

It was well established in this country that Congressional re-districting occurred every ten years after census data were released. However, our neighbors to the east, the citizens of Texas, decided they need not wait ten years to redistrict the state into a more perfect gerrymander.

You, too, the Benchmark 3 Conferees, given the development of your field and its growth in programs, practitioners and participants, may not have the luxury of waiting until 2016 to define your profession and herald its progress.

I congratulate you and wish you good fortune.