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Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

MA Board of Higher Education Adopts Nation's 1st Statewide Civic Learning Policy for Public Campuses

*Community Colleges, State U's and UMass
Campuses to Deepen Focus on Preparing Students
for Engaged Citizenship*

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May 7, 2014 -- Brockton, MA -- The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education has adopted a first-in-the-nation state policy on civic learning for public colleges and universities and will work with the Commonwealth's community colleges, state universities and University of Massachusetts campuses to incorporate civic learning as an "expected outcome" for undergraduate students beginning in the 2014-15 academic year, the Department of Higher Education announced today.

"With this vote the BHE urges Massachusetts' public campuses to reaffirm a shared commitment to the civic learning which is essential if students are to meet their future responsibilities as citizens," said Richard M. Freeland, Commissioner of Higher Education. "This work is at the core of our mission in higher education. It is a commitment that I believe should be met with urgency."

"This is such an important development both for Massachusetts and for the entire nation," said Carol Schneider, President of the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). "In the last few decades, even as more and more Americans have enrolled in higher education, policy leaders have fallen silent on the way college can and should help ensure a strong future for democracy. We have long needed determined leadership to make civic learning in college just as important as preparation for careers. Massachusetts is showing us the way forward by reconnecting college, careers and civic vitality."

The new policy drew heavily on a report from a study group assigned to offer recommendations to guide campuses in the work of preparing future citizens.

"The board's endorsement of this policy validates the commitment and hard work of the study group and its passion for ensuring that this great experiment called 'Democracy' survives and thrives for many years into the future," said Daniel M. Asquino, chair of the Study Group for Civic Learning and Engagement and President of Mount Wachusett Community College. "We all must work toward the goal of learning and practicing the principles of civic learning and civic engagement."

Tuesday's unanimous Board action reaffirmed a March 2012 vote to add civic learning as a key outcome of the [Vision Project](#), the state's strategic agenda to achieve national leadership among state systems of public higher education. With that vote, Massachusetts became the first state to commit to finding a way to actually measure the civic learning of its students using methodologies similar to those used to track academic progress.

At its meeting at Massasoit Community College in Brockton, the BHE voted to define the scope of civic learning as follows:

- *The knowledge component of civic learning includes an understanding of the United States, including its history and governmental traditions, other world societies, and the relationship(s) between and among these cultures and nations.*
- *The intellectual skills component refers to qualities of mind necessary to engage effectively in civic activities.*
- *The applied competencies component refers to the practical skills and capacities needed to engage effectively in civic activities.*
- *The values component refers to understanding the social and political values that are associated with democratic and civic institutions.*

The Board encouraged the state's public campuses to develop their own programs and curricula to foster civic learning as defined by the new policy, while also announcing a four-point action plan to advance the system wide goals through:

- 1) Attention to civic learning as a goal in campus strategic plans;
- 2) Facilitation and support for campus work in civic learning through conferences and meetings to share best practices and provide funding for campus projects;
- 3) Development of new ways to measure and report students' civic learning outcomes;

4) Collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a cross-sector plan for civic learning from kindergarten through college.

The Board's vote builds upon a long history of fostering civic engagement through service learning and other opportunities for students at the state's public campuses.

Now well into its second "Decade of Civic Engagement," **Mount Wachusett Community College** is embedding civic learning into its culture and serving as a state and national model. During the FY13 academic year, 144,000 hours of service learning, volunteerism, internships, co-ops, practicums and field experience were performed, with a value of \$3.24 million to the North Central Massachusetts region.

Next fall, **Fitchburg State University**, in partnership with Mount Wachusett, will use the American Association of Colleges and Universities' LEAP VALUE rubrics to develop a new means of evaluating and assessing students' civic learning.

The **Massachusetts Maritime Academy** has – at the urging of its students – made civic engagement experiences mandatory for all freshmen.

Ten public campuses – including all five campuses of the **University of Massachusetts** – have received the Community Engagement Classification from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, an honor given to only 163 public campuses in the U.S.

A complete copy of the Board's Civic Learning policy is available [here](#).

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