

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 14-48

COMMITTEE DATE: April 29, 2014

BOARD DATE: May 6, 2014

POLICY ON CIVIC LEARNING

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education acknowledges receipt of *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement*, submitted by the Study Group on Civic Learning and Engagement to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. The Study Group's findings and recommendations have given the Board a wealth of information about civic learning and engagement and have provided the basis for the Board's policy.

The Board thanks the Study Group, including Study Group Chair President Dan Asquino and DHE lead staff Shelley Tinkham, for its hard work, and reaffirms its 2012 commitment to the Vision Project goal of Preparing Citizens.

The Board of Higher Education approves the attached Policy on Civic Learning for implementation across the community colleges and state universities, and invites the participation of the University of Massachusetts in this effort.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 6, 9(c), 9(u) and 32.

Contact: Dr. Carlos Santiago, Senior Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

May 2014

Policy on Civic Learning

In March 2012, the Board of Higher Education charged the Department of Higher Education (DHE) with developing a plan to incorporate a key outcome on civic education and engagement in a liberal arts context in future Vision Project reports. In response, in October 2012, the DHE created a Study Group on Civic Learning and Engagement comprising representatives from Massachusetts' public higher education institutions, the Legislature, and non-profit organizations. The DHE charged the Study Group with several responsibilities, including: becoming familiar with the literature and current practices in civic education and engagement; formulating a definition of civic education and its goals and objectives; making recommendations to the Board to achieve the outcome of Preparing Citizens; and identifying metrics with which to measure progress towards achieving this outcome.

The Board of Higher Education acknowledges receipt of *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement*¹ submitted by the Study Group.² The Study Group's findings and recommendations have given the Board a wealth of information about civic learning and engagement and have provided the basis for the Board's policy as outlined in this document.

The Board thanks the Study Group for its hard work over the past several months and reaffirms its 2012 commitment to *Preparing Citizens* as a Vision Project goal.

Definition of Civic Learning

As the Study Group notes, establishing a common understanding of what we mean by civic learning is the essential first step in developing programmatic strategies to advance the goal of preparing students for engaged citizenship. Drawing on the work of the Study Group and key literature in the field, especially the report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (2012), the Board adopts the following definition of Civic Learning for the purpose of the Vision Project:

Civic learning means acquisition of the knowledge, the intellectual skills and the applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic and

¹ This report may be accessed at www.mass.edu/preparingcitizensreport

² The Study group distinguished between "civic learning," meaning the competencies needed by individual students to become informed and effective citizens, and "civic engagement" referring to participation of faculty, staff and students in civic life through partnerships between institutions and their respective communities. To be clear that the Board of Higher Education is establishing policy specifically regarding a student learning outcome, this document employs the term "civic learning" rather than the broader "civic learning and engagement" used in the Study Group report.

democratic life; it also means acquiring an understanding of the social values that underlie democratic structures and practices.

- *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.*

Given that the national discussion of civic learning as a core component of American higher education has not yet resulted in broad agreement about specific programmatic content, the development of detailed outcomes within each of the four components contained in this definition should be left to the individual campuses.³ The Board notes the thoughtful work of the Study Group in suggesting outcomes for these components as outlined in the *Massachusetts Student Civic Learning and Engagement Assessment Framework*, and commends this discussion to the attention of faculty and staff as they think about their own approaches to civic learning.⁴

The Board agrees with the Study Group's assertion that civic learning should be complementary, not competitive, with other academic subjects, especially the liberal arts and sciences, and workforce preparation. Indeed, the skills needed by citizens are often the same as those needed in the 21st century workplace, including: building consensus; solving problems in groups; and knowledge of other cultures and countries as economies grow more global. Students will need to act within a civic context regardless of their academic discipline or eventual field of employment.

The Board recognizes that civic learning will invariably give rise to different positions and values as students engage on civic issues. Standard institutional principles of academic freedom and respect for active and open discourse will serve our faculty and students well in this regard.

Finally, the Board appreciates the emphasis that the Study Group places on programmatic approaches through which civic learning can be fostered and endorses the study group's recommendation that campuses should think about engendering civic learning through academic coursework, co-curricular activities and off-campus civic engagement. Given the challenges of defining measurable learning outcomes (discussed in Section 3 below under "Board Actions") in the area of civic learning

³ In its definition of civic learning, the National Task Force suggested four components: knowledge, skills, values and collective action and included a list of schema under each component. The Study Group suggested civic and democratic knowledge, skills, values and action and included a list of schema for each, similar to the National Task Force. The Board's nomenclature of the components is consistent with both the Task Force and the Study Group, except that it prefers and has used the term "applied competences" to make it clear that the term refers specifically to student skills.

⁴ The Massachusetts Student Civic Learning and Engagement Assessment Framework can be found in the Study Group's report on pages 26-27.

combined with the focus of the Vision Project on accountability and public reporting, the ability of campuses to document student participation in experiences designed to promote this goal is especially significant.

The Board found that the description of civic learning provided by the Lumina Foundation in the Degree Qualifications Profile was especially informative with respect to the special role of civic engagement:

Higher education is experimenting with new ways to prepare students for effective democratic and global citizenship. Virtually all of these efforts use experiential or field based learning as a means to develop civic insight, competence in public affairs and the ability to contribute to the common good. By definition, field-based learning about civic issues is likely to immerse students in public debate about contested positions. In developing civic competence, students engage a wide variety of perspectives and evidence and form their own reasoned views on public issues (The Degree Qualifications Profile, 2011, p. 9).

As the campuses work to further develop their approaches to civic learning, the Board encourages them to utilize the Board's definition of civic learning and consider the discussion points in this section of the policy.

Board Actions to Promote the Development of Civic Learning

The Board adopts four action items across four broad areas – strategic planning, support, data collection, and coordination with public schools – to promote the development of civic learning at the community colleges and state universities and invites the participation of the University of Massachusetts.

1. Strategic Planning

The Board recognizes that colleges and universities have played an important role in preparing students for effective citizenship throughout American history. In recent years this role has largely been expressed through an emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences, a uniquely American tradition that remains vital for the education of our citizens. However, there is also evidence that education's commitment to civic learning has waned in recent years at both the K-12 and collegiate levels; a lack of awareness about American history and political processes, and a superficial understanding of public issues, both domestic and international, among young people today are often cited as indicators of higher education's inattention to these matters.

In light of these concerns and consistent with the Massachusetts Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning's *Renewing the Social Compact* (2012) and the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Engagement's seminal report, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (2012), the Board calls upon our public colleges and universities to recommit themselves to civic learning in all of its many facets.

Action: As with the other Vision Project goals, beginning in 2014-2015, the Board calls upon the campuses to incorporate civic learning as defined in this policy as an expected outcome for undergraduate students.

The method by which campuses choose to foster civic learning can vary and should be reflective of the institution's mission and curricular structures. As noted in the definition of civic learning, useful approaches may include embedding civic learning in general education, core courses, major courses, co-curricular activities and off-campus experiences. Campuses may wish to consider the recommendations of the Study Group in thinking about this matter, especially the *Massachusetts Institutional Rubric for the Promotion and Development of Civic Learning (Institutional Rubric)*, *Massachusetts Civic Learning and Engagement Assessment Framework (Student Learning Framework)* and relevant challenges outlined in Appendix D.

2. Support

The Board of Higher Education acknowledges the Study Group's assertion that, in comparison with traditional academic studies in institutions of higher education, civic learning is a field in which widely accepted outcomes and content are still being developed. Consequently, the Board recognizes the importance of and accepts the Study Group's recommendation that the Board of Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education should facilitate and support the implementation of civic learning in order to take this emerging field to scale across public higher education.

Action: Beginning in 2014-2015, the Board of Higher Education charges the Department of Higher Education to 1) convene the community colleges and state universities, and invite the University of Massachusetts and other stakeholders for the purpose of sharing best practices, research, methodology, pedagogy and other information concerning civic learning; and 2) make grants, to the extent they are available, for fellowships, projects, curriculum development, faculty training and research to develop and promote civic learning with emphasis on multi-year projects.

3. Data Collection

Because civic learning as an academic field in higher education is relatively new, data collection of variables that would capture students' civic learning are not yet well developed. There is no data available within the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) that the Department can use to compare Massachusetts students' civic learning outcomes on a national level, nor is this data collected in the Department's Higher Education Information Resource System (HEIRS). Furthermore, capturing and documenting student learning outcomes through the co-curriculum and civic engagement present special challenges. In light of these difficulties, it is likely that, in the immediate future, the most useful indicators of student work with respect to civic learning may involve collecting numerical data on the incidence of student participation in experiences specifically designed to promote this goal, such as the number of students who take courses with civic learning objectives or participate in off-campus civic engagement activities. While statistics documenting student involvement in these kinds of experiences will not directly measure learning outcomes, they can provide strong evidence of the intentionality with which campuses are working to foster civic learning.

In order to include data on students' civic learning in future Vision Project reports, the Board recognizes the crucial importance of supporting the development of appropriate infrastructure to measure the complex data that would capture students' civic learning.

Improved data collection would assist institutions to develop the field and allow the Department to understand how civic learning impacts other student outcomes.

Action: Beginning in 2014-2015, the Board of Higher Education charges the Department of Higher Education to convene representatives of the community colleges and the state universities, and invite the University of Massachusetts and other stakeholders to discuss possible approaches to capturing the extent and variety of civic learning on the campuses.

Consistent with the Study Group's recommendations pertaining to data collection, these meetings should include discussions on how to 1) operationalize civic learning metrics in a manner in which they can be collected through the Department's Higher Education Information Research System (HEIRS); 2) consider the possibility of using the LEAP Civic Engagement VALUE rubric in connection with the Department's work on learning outcomes assessment⁵ and 3) consider developing a consortium to administer the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) respectively, at regular intervals and in relationship to other institutional and Board initiatives. Data collected through the CCSSE and NSSE surveys may provide an efficient and effective way to measure students' civic learning and engagement in a manner that is quantifiable and comparable with other states, one of the goals of the Vision Project. Other alternatives are likely to emerge as well.

4. Coordination with Public Schools

As noted in Section 1 above, the responsibilities of educational institutions to foster civic learning do not begin at the college level. Concerns have been raised, both nationally and within Massachusetts, that high school students lack an awareness of American history and political processes, international issues, world culture and geography.⁶ This lack of knowledge, combined with insufficient development of the skills and capacities that engaged citizens need, will undermine the achievement of the Vision Project outcome of Preparing Citizens. As in other areas of college readiness, such as mathematics and English, there is a need to coordinate civic learning from pre-school through post-secondary education.

In the winter of 2013, both the Board of Higher Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted a joint definition of college and career readiness that outlines the knowledge, skills and abilities that students should demonstrate in order to successfully complete entry-level, credit-bearing college courses, participate in certificate or workplace training programs, and enter economically viable career pathways. This definition also included a set of attributes that provides the framework for college and career readiness, supports educational and workplace success and provides the basis for being an active participant in our democracy. However, the specific civic learning competencies which entering college students should demonstrate are not discussed in the

⁵ For more information about the LEAP Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric, contact value@aacu.org.

⁶ For citing national and state concerns, please see *A Crucible Moment and Renewing the Social Compact: A Report of the Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning*, respectively.

definition.⁷ Addressing this gap should be part of our overall approach to civic learning and college readiness.

Action: The Board charges the Commissioner to pursue discussions with the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding how best to coordinate work on civic learning in the public schools with the implementation of this policy in the community colleges and the state universities, and to develop a cross-sector plan to accomplish this goal.

Follow up

The Department is asked to submit a report to the Board on work being done to implement the Policy on Civic Learning no later than June 2016.

⁷ A definition of college and career readiness was approved by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on February 26, 2013; Massachusetts Board of Higher Education on March 12, 2013, and can be found at <http://www.mass.edu/library/documents/2013College&CareerReadinessDefinition.pdf>

Works Cited

- Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning. (2012). *Renewing the social compact: A report of the Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning*. Boston, MA.
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- Study Group on Civic Learning and Engagement.(2014). *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement*, Submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, www.mass.edu/preparingcitizensreport