

INTRODUCTION

The New Civics movement has taken over America’s civics education, with the goal of redefining civics education as progressive (=radical left) political activism. The pioneers of this movement, originally members of the 1960s radical left, took advantage of the demolition of the old civics curriculum in the 1960s. The Old Civics had focused on basic civic literacy—knowledge about the structure of our government and the nature of America’s civic ideal—so as to prepare young men and women to participate in the machinery of self-governance. The 1960s radicals replaced the Old Civics with a New Civics of their own, devoted instead to preparing young men and women to be progressive activists.

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This New Civics began as “service-learning,” and slowly established itself in the next decades in the fringes of higher education. Service-learning feeds off the all-American impulse to volunteer and do good works for others, and diverts it toward progressive causes. For example, service-learning channels the urge to clean up litter from a local park toward support of the anti-capitalist “sustainability” movement. Service-learning’s main goals in higher education are:

1. to funnel university funds and student labor to advertise progressive causes.
2. to support off-campus progressive nonprofits—“community organizations.”
3. to radicalize Americans, using a theory of “community organization” drawn explicitly from the writings of Saul Alinsky, a mid-twentieth-century Chicago radical who developed and publicized tactics of leftist political activism.
4. to “organize” the university itself, by campaigning for more funding for service-learning and allied progressive programs on campus. These allied programs include “diversity” offices, “sustainability” offices,” and components of the university devoted to “social justice.”

Service-learning was created in order to divert university resources toward progressive causes.

In 1985, several influential university presidents founded Campus Compact to support student volunteerism and community service. Service-learning advocates took over Campus Compact’s campaign, and from that vantage point inserted service-learning into virtually every college in the nation. They then gave service-learning a new name—“civic engagement”—and used this new label as a way to replace the old civics curriculum with service-learning classes. Service-learning and civic engagement together form the heart of the New Civics.

The New Civics is now endemic in higher education:

- The presidents of more than 1,100 colleges, with a total enrollment of more than 6 million students, have signed a declaration committing their institutions to “educate students for citizenship.”¹⁶
- The American Democracy Project, an initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in partnership with the *New York Times* that now includes 250 AASCU-member colleges and universities, seeks to “produce graduates who are committed to being knowledgeable, involved citizens in their communities.”¹⁷
- Seventy-one community colleges have signed The Democracy Commitment, a pledge to train students “in civic learning and democratic practice.”¹⁸
- More than 60 organizations and higher education institutions participating in the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network (CLDE) have submitted statements committing them to “advance civic learning and democratic engagement as an essential cornerstone for every student.”¹⁹
- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching awarded a “Community Engagement Classification” to 240 colleges and universities in 2015.²⁰

As of 2016, the “civic engagement” movement—a combination of federal bureaucrats, nonprofit foundations, and a network of administrators and faculty on college campuses—has already succeeded in replacing much of the old civics education. It now aims for a broader takeover of the entire university. The goal is to give every class a “civic” component, and to make “civic engagement” a requirement for tenure. The advocates of “civics education” now aim to insert progressive politics into every aspect of the university, to advertise progressive causes to the student body in every class and every off-campus activity, and to divert even larger portions of the American university system’s resources toward progressive organizations.

16 Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, <http://compact.org/who-we-are/mission-and-vision/presidents-declaration-on-the-civic-responsibility-of-higher-education/>.

17 American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Democracy Project, <http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/>.

18 The Democracy Commitment, About Us. <http://thedemocracycommitment.org/about-us/>.

19 Association of American Colleges & Universities, National Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network, <https://www.AAC&U.org/crucible/action-network>.

20 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, “Carnegie Selects Colleges and Universities for 2015 Community Engagement Classification,” January 7, 2015. <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/newsroom/news-releases/carnegie-selects-colleges-universities-2015-community-engagement-classification/>.

The New Civics advocates want to redefine the entire American civic spirit to serve the progressive political agenda—which is hostile to the free market; supports racial preferences in the guise of *diversity*; supports arbitrary government power in the guise of *sustainability*; and undermines traditional loyalty to America in the guise of *global citizenship*.

The New Civics has replaced the Old Civics, which fostered civic literacy. In consequence, American students' knowledge about their institutions of self government has collapsed. According to the Association of American Colleges & Universities' report *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future* (2012), "Only 24 percent of graduating high school seniors scored at the proficient or advanced level in civics in 2010, fewer than in 2006 or in 1998," "Half of the states no longer require civics education for high school graduation," and "Among 14,000 college seniors surveyed in 2006 and 2007, the average score on a civic literacy exam was just over 50 percent, an 'F'."²¹

What the New Civics has produced instead is a permanently mobilized cadre of student protestors, ready to engage in "street politics" for any left-wing cause. In November 2016, for example, when high-school students around the country walked out from school to protest the election of Donald Trump, New Civics advocates described "the youth-led walkouts as a highly positive form of civic engagement."²² Civic education ought to teach students how presidents are elected, not to engage in political warfare that denies the legitimacy of their fellow citizens' choice for the presidency.

The New Civics also disguises the collapse of solid education in colleges. The universities' resort to internships and "experiential education" already conceded that students do not have four years worth of material to study. Now "service-learning" and "civic engagement" classes transform what was at least useful work experience, if not really a college class, into vocational training for work as progressive community organizers—or for careers in college administration running New Civics programs. While the main goals of the New Civics are to advertise progressive causes and divert

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²¹ *A Crucible Moment*, p. 7.

²² Stell Simonton, "Student Walkouts a Fine Form of Civic Engagement, Say Youth Development Leaders," *Youth Today*, November 15, 2016, <https://youthtoday.org/2016/11/student-walkouts-a-fine-form-of-civic-engagement-say-youth-development-leaders/>.

university resources to progressive organizations, it also works to disguise collapsing standards in education, train community activists, and prepare new personnel to administer New Civics programs.

The New Civics further damages colleges and universities by hollowing out the ideals and the institutional frameworks of a liberal arts education. A liberal arts education aims to introduce a student to the best works of the Western tradition, partly to educate his character toward personal and civic virtue and partly to foster the individuation of character that allows each person to commit himself, as an individual, to private success and public duty. The educational structure that supports the liberal arts takes this education of character to be the first purpose of a college, and one which needs no further justification. In addition to warping the definition of civic virtue by redefining it as commitment to progressive politics, the New Civics also eliminates the idea that the education toward virtue is meant to *precede* political action, and instead substitutes political action *in place of* education toward virtue. The New Civics likewise eliminates the liberal arts' aim to foster the individuation of character, and replaces it with forced mobilization within a *community*, characteristically defined by *race, class, and/or gender* rather than by *American citizenship*. The New Civics then remakes the institutional structure of higher education in its own image: the core curricula that fostered a liberal arts education have been removed, and a new set of core curricula centered on *civic engagement, global citizenship*, and so on, is rising in their place. The New Civics assumes that a liberal arts education cannot justify itself.

The New Civics' advocates are very optimistic about their ability to carry out an educational revolution, and they are not yet in a position to carry out all their plans. Yet they have already achieved great success, by following Saul Alinsky's intelligent recommendation to focus upon capturing institutions and building enduring organizations. The number of New Civics advocates has grown enormously during the last two generations, and these advocates now command a substantial bureaucratic infrastructure. They have already begun to use the regulatory power of the Federal Government to forward their agenda. The New Civics advocates also have prospered by taking advantage of the American public's trust that people hired to educate their children actually have that object in mind. They abuse that trust by using the anodyne vocabulary of "volunteerism" and "civics" to obscure their radical political agenda. The New Civics advocates are not yet an all-powerful force in higher education—but they are a formidable one, and their strength grows each year. Only concerted, thoroughgoing action can remove them from our colleges and universities.

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Readers should be aware that the New Civics movement now extends far beyond college. Project Citizen and similar organizations insert service-learning and the community organizing model into K-12 education,²³ and the New Civics advocates insert publicity for progressive causes wherever they can.²⁴ Here we focus on the role of the New Civics in undergraduate education, but we believe that the New Civics must be excised from every part of the American educational system, from kindergarten to graduate school.

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This report focuses yet further upon four universities in the two mountain states of Colorado and Wyoming. The University of Colorado, Boulder (CU-Boulder), is a national leader in the New Civics movement. Colorado State University in Fort Collins (CSU), the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley (UNC), and the University of Wyoming in Laramie (UW) retain more of the old focus on civic literacy and volunteerism—but the New Civics vocabulary and bureaucracy frames civics education at these three colleges as much as at CU-Boulder. Moreover, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has awarded a Community Engagement Classification to both CSU and UNC.²⁵ These large public universities serve a student body that is fairly typical of modern American college students. Our close analysis of these institutions complements our study of the New Civics at the national level by providing an in-depth examination of the decay of traditional civics education and its replacement by the New Civics—not yet the masters of our universities, but a pervasive and rapidly growing presence throughout the heartland of America’s higher education.

This study has 9 national findings:

1. **Traditional civic literacy is in deep decay in America.** Because middle schools and high schools no longer can be relied on to provide students basic civic literacy, the subject has migrated to colleges. But colleges have generally failed to recognize a responsibility to cover the basic content of *traditional civics*, and have instead substituted programs under the name of civics that bypass instruction in American government and history.
2. **The New Civics, a movement devoted to progressive activism, has taken over civics education.** “Service-learning” and “civic engagement” are the most common labels this movement uses, but it also calls itself *global civics*, *deliberative democracy*, *intercultural learning*, and the like.

23 *Project Citizen: A Portfolio-Based Civic Education Program*, <http://www.civiced.org/images/brochure/brochure-projectcitizen.pdf>.

24 E.g., Brian D. Schultz, *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way: Lesson from an Urban Classroom* (New York, 2008).

25 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, “All Community Engagement Classified Institutions: 2010 and 2015,” p. 2, http://nerche.org/images/stories/projects/Carnegie/2015/2010_and_2015_CE_Classified_Institutions_revised_1_11_15.pdf.

3. **The New Civics movement is national, and it extends far beyond the universities.** Each individual college and university now slots its “civic” efforts into a framework that includes federal and state bureaucracies, national nonprofit organizations, and national professional organizations. Any university that affiliates itself with these national organizations also affiliates itself with their progressive political goals.
4. **The New Civics redefines “civic activity” as “progressive activism.”** It aims to advertise progressive causes to students and to use student labor and university resources to support progressive “community” organizations.
5. **The New Civics redefines “civic activity” as channeling government funds toward progressive nonprofits.** The New Civics has worked to divert government funds to progressive causes since its foundation fifty years ago.
6. **The New Civics redefines “volunteerism” as labor for progressive organizations and administration of the welfare state.** The new measures to require “civic engagement” will make this volunteerism compulsory.
7. **The New Civics replaces traditional liberal arts education with vocational training for community activists.** The traditional liberal arts prepared students for leadership in a free society. The New Civics prepares them to administer the welfare state.
8. **The New Civics also shifts the emphasis of a university education from curricula, drafted by faculty, to “co-curricular activities,” run by non-academic administrators.** The New Civics advocates aim to destroy disciplinary instruction and faculty autonomy.
9. **The New Civics movement aims to take over the entire university.** The New Civics advocates want to make “civic engagement” part of every class, every tenure decision, and every extracurricular activity.

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This study also has 4 local findings:

1. **The University of Colorado, Boulder, possesses an extensive New Civics bureaucracy, but only the fragments of a traditional civics education.** The New Civics' main nodes at CU-Boulder are CU Engage (including CU Dialogues, INVST Community Studies, Leadership Studies Minor, Participatory Action Research, Public Achievement, Puksta Scholars, and Student Worker Alliance Program), service-learning classes, and the Residential Academic Programs.
2. **Colorado State University possesses a moderately extensive New Civics bureaucracy, but only the fragments of a traditional civics education.** The New Civics' main nodes at CSU are Student Leadership, Involvement and Community Engagement (SLiCE), Office for Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs, and the Department of Communication Studies.
3. **The University of Northern Colorado possesses a moderately extensive New Civics bureaucracy, but only the fragments of a traditional civics education.** The New Civics' main nodes at UNC are The Center for Community and Civic Engagement; the Center for Honors, Scholars and Leadership; the Social Science B.A. – Community Engagement Emphasis; Community Engaged Scholars Symposium; and the Student Activities Office.
4. **The University of Wyoming possesses a limited New Civics bureaucracy, and the core of a traditional civics education.** The New Civics' main node at UW is Service, Leadership & Community Engagement (SLCE). UW's traditional civics education is taught halfheartedly at best, and is in the process of being transformed into a less rigorous distribution requirement.

We make 8 national recommendations:

1. **Restore a coordinated civic literacy curriculum at both the high school and college levels.** Civics education should not start at the college level. When students' first exposure to civics education comes in college, something has gone wrong with their education at the lower levels. States should design their high school and college civics educations as a coherent whole, and make sure that undergraduate civics education provides more advanced education than high-school civics.
2. **Define civics education as civic literacy, in a traditional academic course.** Colleges and universities should define civics education as specifically as possible, so as to limit the ability of progressive activists to substitute the New Civics. Civics education should be defined explicitly as a way to learn testable material in class—such as the structure and function of the different parts of the Federal Government, America's historical geography, and landmark Supreme Court cases and their consequences—and be defined equally explicitly not to include service-learning, civic engagement, or any other activities besides

reading, writing, classroom discussion, and classroom examinations. (See Appendix 4: **Civic Literacy** for a sample list of facts and topics that ought to be included in civics courses.) The stated ideals of civics education should make clear that this knowledge is in itself so valuable for any citizen that it needs no further justification.

3. **Redefine civic ideals in non-progressive language.** Colleges and universities should use traditional language to define inspirational civic ideals and actions. The definition of civic ideals should emphasize unpoliticized education for participation in government, and explicitly distinguish between civic activity and participation in extra-governmental political pressure groups.
4. **Freeze or curtail all federal and state funding for service-learning and civic engagement.** These programs have had bipartisan support back to President George H. W. Bush's federal-level initiatives in the early 1990s. Yet no matter how well-intentioned these programs, they now are used to advertise progressive causes, support progressive community organizations, and provide jobs for progressives in academic administration. The progressive takeover of these programs can only be kept in bounds by more oversight than it is realistic to expect from a federal or state legislature. Legislatures ought to be able to rely on local administrators doing what they are supposed to do with government funds, and in this case they cannot. Moreover, even if service-learning and civic engagement could be depoliticized, they provide no real college-level education. Public money for service-learning and civic engagement should be capped immediately.
5. **Remove the service-learning and civic engagement bureaucracies from the universities.** The administrators in charge of these programs cannot distinguish education from progressive activism. Their career goals are to divert university resources to progressive organizations and to reorganize the university for progressive goals. No further personnel should be hired for these bureaucracies; as New Civics bureaucrats retire or resign, their positions should be eliminated. In due time, these programs need to be de-funded and closed. Presumably attrition will thin the ranks of these administrators before their positions are finally eliminated. The public will support this effort when it learns that the cost savings will be substantial.

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6. **Legislators should mandate full and detailed fiscal transparency by all public educational institutions.** College administrators hide New Civics expenditures to conceal its expansion, and they will hide New Civics expenditures so as to thwart any effort by legislators or trustees to cap the New Civics. Colleges and universities must have transparent finances, so that college administrators can be held accountable by legislators and the public.
7. **Foster a genuine culture of volunteerism.** Many colleges now define volunteer activities as civic engagement. This conflation should be stopped at once. Moreover, all volunteer activities ought to be genuinely volunteer activities—coordinated by volunteers and done by volunteers, without financial support or class credit. Colleges and universities should state explicitly that a “volunteer” activity for which you receive remuneration is really an internship as an administrator of the welfare state.
8. **Create a rival national alliance of educational organizations dedicated to countering and replacing the national alliance of service-learning organizations.** The New Civics movement can pretend that its program of progressive activism and advocacy is generic civics education because it has the field to itself. An alternative national alliance of civics organizations needs to work forcefully to promote unpoliticized civics education, focused around civic literacy rather than civic engagement. This alternative national alliance should work to promote traditional civic literacy and dislodge the New Civics, by rallying public opinion and informing federal and state legislators. This alternative national alliance should also provide national civics programs for the use of American universities, aligned toward traditional civic literacy rather than progressive activism.

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We make 2 local recommendations:

1. **The University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado State University, the University of Northern Colorado, and the University of Wyoming should cap spending for their New Civics bureaucracies.** Funding for any activity labeled as “service-learning,” “civic engagement,” or any other specialized term from the New Civics vocabulary should also be capped, with the long-term goal of its elimination. Any worthwhile activities currently run by the New Civics bureaucrats should be transformed into unpaid, volunteer activity.

2. **The University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado State University, and the University of Northern Colorado should restore their traditional civics education, while the University of Wyoming should improve the way it teaches its required civics course.** All four institutions should invest money to make sure the restored civics curriculum is taught in small classes, and if possible with a tuition remission for the students.

PROGRESSIVE POLITICS: A NOTE

This report goes along with a basic claim of the New Civics movement: that it only came about because of a conversation within the discipline of civics education. We trace the history of the New Civics as if that were the case, but that is merely a convenient simplification. The New Civics isn't a pedagogical movement that happens to have been captured by political progressives; it is, to the contrary, one more opportunistic extension of progressive activism. The rationale of civic pedagogy is a fig leaf.

The Association of American Colleges & Universities' report *A Crucible Moment* (2012)—a touchstone document of the New Civics, discussed below at greater length—identifies civics education with political activism “to eliminate persistent inequalities, especially those in the United States determined by income and race,” and with activism about “growing global economic inequalities, climate change and environmental degradation, lack of access to quality health care, economic volatility, and more.” *A Crucible Moment's* explicit conflation of civics and progressive activism reveals the real point of the New Civics. There is no substantive distinction between the New Civics and other progressive takeovers of higher education, such as the diversity and sustainability movements. The New Civics is hostile to the free market; supports racial preferences in the guise of *diversity*; supports arbitrary government power in the guise of *sustainability*; and undermines traditional loyalty to America in the guise of *global citizenship*. It is no accident that these components of the modern progressive agenda permeate the New Civics. The purpose of the New Civics is to advance progressive politics.

The reader should keep this broader progressive campaign in mind, even as we focus upon what now goes under the name of civics education.