

# Whose Values Anyway?

*Anne Colby*

TWO POWERFUL CURRENTS flowing through contemporary American higher education are pulling the field in different directions. The stronger of the two is a trend toward specialization and commercialization. This current is leading to the creation of an education industry that is responsive to market pressures, concentrating on preparing workers suited to American industry and giving students skills to compete economically so they can lead more comfortable, affluent lives. In this model, students are treated as consumers who invest time and money in higher education in order to receive future economic benefits. This increasingly powerful corporate model of higher education imports the values assumptions, language, and administrative policies of the business world, including marketing and market research, corporate management strategies, and aggressive public-relations campaigns. This conception of higher education is part of a longer-term historical change in the way higher education's purposes are understood, a shift away from an earlier conception of the public purposes of higher education

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and toward a more individualistic, technical, and morally disinterested understanding of those purposes.

At the same time that universities move in this specialized and narrowly market-driven direction, we see a groundswell of interest in higher education's capacity to contribute to stronger communities, a more responsive democratic system, and more engaged citizens. Critics from outside and within the academy are joining a chorus of calls to revitalize the public purposes of higher education, including educating for students' moral and civic development, as well as technical and more narrowly intellectual learning. The urgency of these calls is reinforced by a society-wide concern about the extent to which citizens, especially young people, are disengaged from public life.

I believe there is reason for serious concern about higher education's move toward a corporate and individualistic approach, and that we need to support the growing but still somewhat peripheral movement to make higher education a force for strengthening American democracy. Borrowing ideas and practices from the business world may increase the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions of higher education in some ways, and has no doubt made schools more responsive to the interests of their students. Heavy reliance on a corporate model, however, risks obscuring important differences between profit-making businesses and nonprofit educational institutions. Although financial viability is an obvious prerequisite to the continued existence of a college or university, if used as the overriding criterion for setting and evaluating priorities and policies, it will subordinate concern for many important learning outcomes and public purposes to a narrow understanding of educational goals.

Many kinds of social institution play important roles in educating citizens. Religious organizations and other voluntary associations, the media, and education at the elementary and secondary levels are among the most important of these. But higher education is critical because universities and colleges are the institutions most clearly charged with leading the development of new and deeper understanding through

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research and scholarship, and preparing new generations by teaching not only information and skills, but their significance for personally and collectively creating the future. Higher education has tremendous opportunities as a positive force in society as it reaches an ever-larger segment of the population, including virtually all leaders in government and the private sector. It is a powerful influence in shaping individuals' relationships with each other and their communities, and we need to ensure that its influence is constructive rather than corrosive. There is no question that higher education has begun to respond to these concerns. In response to calls for a renewal of civic engagement and social responsibility, colleges and universities are becoming more directly involved in efforts to address social problems in their local communities, for example by developing partnerships with local schools or establishing public forums for discussion of political and policy issues.

In addition to this kind of institutional engagement, some colleges and universities have begun to place greater emphasis on student outcomes that concern public service, civic participation and leadership, and humane or ethical values and behavior. This is apparent in the proliferation of curricular and extracurricular programs designed to foster the development of students' moral and civic responsibility, such as ethics across the curriculum, service-learning, and community service programs such as alternative spring break.

Educational leaders have established a number of national networks to support this kind of work, the most visible of which are networks concerned with service-learning, such as Campus Compact and the Learn and Serve Higher Education initiative of the Corporation for National Service. In addition to the development of these specialized networks, national organizations of higher education such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association of Higher Education are placing these concerns at the center of their agendas. Communication about this work is broadening its reach as national conferences are held on college student values and education for civic participation.

But even as this movement to reinstate the public purposes of higher education strengthens, there are powerful points of resistance to it. Whether the movement can significantly temper the trend toward education as a commodity for individual advancement is very much in question. Higher education could continue to drift loose from its moorings as an institution for the public good and move farther down the path toward market-driven training unconcerned with the education of the student as person and citizen. A number of arguments are raised over and over to justify giving up higher education's moral and civic purposes, to make these goals seem obsolete in the contemporary world. These arguments are widespread and threaten to nip in the bud the revival of the public purposes of higher education, or at least to keep it very much on the margin of academic life. This essay will argue that these objections are misplaced, ill-informed, and incorrect.

#### Argument: Higher Education Has No Business Addressing Values

The first of these arguments is that higher education has no business addressing issues of values: it should be value-neutral, impart knowledge and skills, and leave questions of moral and civic values to the family, the church, and political institutions. Although this recommendation may seem plausible at first glance, closer scrutiny makes it clear that educational institutions cannot be value-neutral. For decades educators have recognized the power of the hidden curriculum in schools and the moral messages it carries.<sup>1</sup> The hidden curriculum is the (largely unexamined) practices through which the school and its teachers operate—maintain discipline, assign grades and other rewards, and man-

1. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Indoctrination and Relativity in Value Education," *Xygon* 6 (1971): 285–309; P. W. Jackson, *Life in the Classroom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968); G. D. Fenstermacher, "Some Moral Considerations on Teaching as a Profession," in J. Goodlad, R. Soder, and K. Sirotnik, eds., *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990): 130–54.

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age their relationships with their students and each other. Although most research on the hidden curriculum has been directed toward elementary and secondary education, the concept applies equally to higher education. If college students see faculty rewarded for pursuing their own professional prestige rather than caring for others or the institution, if they are subjected to competitive climates in which one student's success contributes to another's failure, if they are confronted with institutional hypocrisy, they themselves can become cynical and self-interested. On the other hand, when faculty are scrupulously honest, fair, and caring with their students and approach their scholarship with integrity, they teach powerful moral lessons of a very different sort.

In addition to these values messages in relations between faculty and students, messages of instrumental individualism and materialism are more and more prevalent in the broader institutional and peer cultures on many campuses. The commercialization of higher education, including corporate sponsorship of faculty and student research, corporate underwriting of certain courses, advertising on websites, and exclusive beverage-pouring rights given to products such as Coke or Pepsi at sports and other events, though it provides some institutional benefits, also acts to reinforce themes of materialism and commercialism that are pervasive in the general culture. Few would deny the influence of commercial interests on the informal learning contexts in which college students are immersed through television, film, music, and other media. When higher education reinforces these cultural trends, it may appear to be value-neutral, but clearly it is not.

Academic disciplines also embody values assumptions that contribute to shaping students' frames of reference, though these assumptions are often unexamined and thus invisible. The preponderance of research in economics and much of that in political science, for example, build on a model that assumes rational choice, which is seldom subjected to critical analysis in the teaching of these disciplines. This model of human behavior assumes that individuals always seek to maximize their perceived interests and that social phenomena represent the ag-

gregate of individuals employing this self-interested strategy. A similar perspective is fostered by research and theory in other fields such as sociobiology and some approaches within psychology, which also assume a self-interested or mechanistic view of human nature. An unquestioned reliance on these models of human behavior can result in a normalization of self-interestedness, contributing to the common belief that individuals are always fundamentally motivated by self-interest, that altruism or genuine concern for others' welfare are illusory, and that failing to act strategically to achieve one's own self-interested goals would be foolish.<sup>2</sup>

In many disciplines, including such wide-ranging fields as literature, genetics, engineering, and business, moral issues are integral to the material, and teaching that does not address them is itself a lesson in a particular way to orient to complex, multidimensional material. James Rest, Muriel Bebeau, Janet Walker, and others have written about the central role of interpretation and sensitivity to moral issues in moral understanding and behavior.<sup>3</sup> In a recent paper Janet Walker explores the implications of the fact that most life situations are inherently ambiguous, their moral significance underdetermined by available facts. In order to find meaning and clarity amid this ambiguity, people develop habits of moral interpretation and intuition through which they perceive the world. In effect, people with different habits of moral interpretation live in worlds that can be very different, although they have much in common, and these worlds present different opportunities and imperatives for moral action.

2. For a discussion of these issues in the field of economics, see Myra H. Strober, "Rethinking Economics through a Feminist Lens," *American Economic Review* (May 1994): 143–47.

3. See, for example: J. Rest, *Development in Judging Moral Issues* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979); M. J. Bebeau, "Influencing the Moral Dimension of Dental Practice," in J. Rest and D. Narvaez, eds., *Moral Development in the Professions* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Press, 1994); J. Walker, "Choosing Biases, Using Power and Practicing Resistance: Moral Development in a World without Certainty," *Human Development* 43:3(2000): 135–94.

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Over and over in their undergraduate careers, students encounter course material that raises salient moral issues, but in most classrooms these issues are consistently set aside as irrelevant to understanding the material. This constitutes systematic, though unintentional, training in habits of moral interpretation that teach students to turn a blind eye toward the moral issues implicit in many situations. In these and many other ways, educational institutions convey values and moral messages to their students. This is unavoidable. Given this reality, it seems preferable for these institutions to examine their values and make more conscious, deliberate choices about what they convey to students. This brings us back into controversy, since in making these choices, educational institutions are forced to confront the pluralistic nature of our society and thus of our faculty and student bodies.

## Argument: Whose Values?

One effort to remain apparently value-neutral while educating responsible citizens is through the cultivation of “value-free” or “content-free” skills of intellectual discipline, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning. These goals are, after all, at the heart of higher education’s academic identity. Although fostering civic participation or engagement is also quite likely to be regarded as safely value-neutral and thus theoretically relatively benign, in practice it raises questions about the political ideologies that lie behind it, and therefore begins to encounter resistance. The most heated objections arise relative to approaches that include concern for morality, character, and values along with attention to civic engagement and responsibility. Questions of whose values, assumptions of indoctrination, and complaints that “this is not the proper role of higher education,” begin in earnest as soon as the word “morality” is used.

Why not, then, focus on the development of skills needed for effective citizenship, including such undeniably valuable capacities as critical thinking, and leave the development of values and morality to the

private sphere? My colleagues and I have argued elsewhere that this is neither desirable nor even possible. To assume that cultivation of core academic capacities such as analytical thinking and disinterested scientific and scholarly expertise is sufficient to produce responsible citizens who will devote themselves to the common good of society begs the question of motivation to do so and flies in the face of extensive evidence of contemporary civic and political disengagement, particularly among young people. There is plenty of evidence that recipients of this kind of education are choosing more and more to apply their analytic skills and professional expertise to their own personal advancement, and the educational approach described here does not presume to address that trend.

Can we focus on education for civic responsibility and thereby avoid addressing the most controversial area of *moral* values? This move will not work either, because education for democratic participation necessarily engages moral issues. Our democratic principles, including tolerance and respect for others, procedural impartiality, and concern for both the rights of the individual and the welfare of the group, are all grounded in moral principles.

Likewise, the problems that the civically engaged citizen must confront always include strong moral themes—for example, fair access to resources such as housing, the moral obligation to consider future generations in making environmental policy, and the conflicting claims of multiple stakeholders in community decision-making. None of these issues can be resolved adequately without a consideration of moral questions. A person can become civically and politically active without good judgment and a strong moral compass, but it is hardly wise to promote that kind of involvement. Because civic responsibility is inescapably threaded with moral values, higher education must aspire to foster both moral and civic maturity and must confront educationally the many links between them.

This brings us to the second common objection to undergraduate moral and civic education: we live in a pluralistic society, so there is no

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legitimate way to determine which (or whose) values ought to be conveyed. This objection takes two forms. The first derives from the diversity that characterizes contemporary American society, which comprises people of many cultural backgrounds and traditions, religions, and political perspectives. The second reflects the recognition that within any given cultural tradition, there are reasonable variations and disagreements about many moral, civic, political, and religious issues.

In addressing these concerns, it is important to distinguish between pluralism and moral relativism. A pluralistic view of morality assumes that two or more incommensurable moral frameworks can be justified. This does not mean that *any* possible moral framework is justifiable, only that there are multiple valid moral frameworks that cannot be reduced to a single system. In contrast, moral relativism holds that there is no basis at all for distinguishing among moral positions, that none can be considered any more or less valid than any other. Few critics of moral and civic education are relativistic in this sense. If they were, they would not be able to argue with any credibility that universities ought not indoctrinate their students with an arbitrary set of values, since this argument is itself a moral claim that, presumably, they feel they can justify on moral grounds.

For many years, anthropologists have documented the plural norms that exist in different cultures throughout the world (diversity in what people do or believe they ought to do). Some have argued that this diversity of norms is superficial and, once its meaning is understood, it reduces to underlying moral principles common to all cultures. Others have tried to show that cultural diversity reflects fundamental differences in moral perspectives, so that the values most important in one culture are much less central or salient in another. Richard Shweder has done extensive field work to document the fact that moral concepts such as autonomy, individual rights, and justice, which are central to American and European conceptions of morality, are, in other cultures such as India, overshadowed by other more elaborated and salient moral

concepts such as duty, sacrifice, and loyalty.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note, however, that even in anthropological research documenting cultural differences in moral values, there are boundaries to the range of what is seen to count as an ultimate moral good, and that even very different moral perspectives include (though they do not stress) the values of the other perspectives. Differences in moral frames of reference are best seen as differences in how a common set of base values are ordered when they conflict, and which of those values are more salient in practice. Even anthropologists who believe there is fundamental moral heterogeneity across cultures do not generally believe in extreme and unqualified cultural relativism. Even very different (and fundamentally incommensurate) moral perspectives build on a base set of moral goods or virtues that human beings have in common. Presumably, these commonalities will be even stronger within a single country, even a culturally heterogeneous and pluralistic country such as the United States.

How do we identify the moral commonalities or shared values that constitute a foundation on which American institutions of higher education can build consensus, while recognizing that the shared moral values often come into conflict with each other and that individuals and subcultures create different hierarchies among them? One important source of a common core of values for American higher education derives from the responsibility to educate for citizenship that most institutions acknowledge, even when it does not shape their practices to any significant degree. This responsibility is clear in public institutions. But even private colleges and universities receive public support, if only by virtue of their tax-exempt status, and almost all college and university mission statements refer to their responsibility to educate for leadership and contribution to society. The responsibility to prepare citizens for participation in a democratic system implies that some

4. R. Shweder, "True Ethnography: The Lore, the Law, and the Lure," in R. Jessor, A. Colby, and R. Shweder, eds., *Ethnography and Human Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 15–52.

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values, including some *moral* values, ought to be represented in these institutions' educational goals. These values include mutual respect and tolerance, concern for the rights and welfare of individuals and the community, recognition that each individual is part of the larger social fabric, and a commitment to civil and rational discourse and procedural impartiality.

Universities' educational and scholarly missions also entail a set of core values. Few would dispute that higher education ought to embody the values of intellectual integrity and concern for truth. The academic enterprise would be fatally compromised if these values ceased to guide scholarship, teaching, and learning, however imperfect the guidance may be in practice. Equally central to an institution of scholarship and higher education are the ideals of open-mindedness, willingness to listen to and take seriously the ideas of others, and ongoing public discussion of contested issues.

Beyond this generic set of core values derived from the civic and intellectual purposes of higher education, some private colleges (and even a few public) stand for more specific moral, cultural, or religious values. The particular missions of these institutions and their implications for their educational programs must be made clear to prospective students and faculty. The most obvious examples are religiously affiliated colleges and universities that offer faith-based education in many denominations. Among public institutions, military academies are mandated to educate military officers, so their values are defined in reference to this goal. Other public colleges were established to serve particular populations, such as (American Indian) tribal colleges, which often explicitly acknowledge special values such as traditional tribal values in their curricula and programs.

If the values on which there is broad consensus within an institution are taken seriously, they constitute strong guiding principles for programs of moral and civic development in higher education. Even so, they leave open to debate the application of these principles to many particular situations. Especially in institutions that stand for a commit-

ment to rational public discourse, as higher education must, discussion of the most difficult questions of conflicting values can and should be left open to debate. Moral and civic education provides the tools for such debate. This means that we need not begin with agreement on the most difficult and controversial cases of conflict between values. This makes it possible to reach a consensus on the initial set of core values.

Some critics may agree that, in principle, this approach to undergraduate education would be a good thing, but fear that in practice moral and civic education programs carry unacknowledged political and ideological baggage. These fears come from all points on the political spectrum, with terms like morality and character raising concerns about conservative influences and references to social justice or social change eliciting fears of liberal political agendas. It is important to be vigilant against educational practices that suppress a diversity of perspectives, and when abuses occur, it is both ethically and educationally indefensible. In my experience, however, most people engaged in college-level moral and civic education are aware of these risks and careful to guard against abuses.

In a project of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, several colleagues and I visited colleges and universities of all sorts that have made moral and civic education a priority, and have reviewed the work of many more. In our visits to even the most specialized institutions, we were surprised by the consistency with which faculty took care to ensure that multiple points of view were heard, and encouraged students to question and think through the assumptions in the dominant institutional culture. At Messiah College, a strongly Christian college of the Brethren in Christ Church, students often enter college not having questioned their faith and with little experience of people from other denominations. The faculty, who are charged with helping students explore the relationship between reason and faith, try to shake students up, encourage them to think for themselves, and push them out of their comfort zone. At the United States Air Force Academy, students understand that their future roles as military officers are subject

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to military command and military law, but they are also taught to disobey unlawful orders. This means that cadets have to develop the capacity for mature, independent judgment in complex and ambiguous situations, even within the military chain of command. At Portland State University, an urban institution in the politically liberal city of Portland, Oregon, faculty teaching service-learning courses meet regularly to talk about how to make sure all voices are heard in their discussions of moral, political, and policy issues.

Every institution we visited shares a central concern for student capacities inimical to any effort to impose a particular party line. These capacities include openness to reason, ability to communicate effectively, tolerance of perspectives different from one's own, clarity of thought and critical thinking, and capacity for moral discourse across points of view. With the exception of honor codes that require adherence to standards of honesty, the central pedagogies and other programs intended to foster moral and civic responsibility in these institutions are self-consciously noncoercive. In part because they are encouraged to think independently, the students we observed did not appear reluctant to resist if they thought a faculty member or another student was trying to impose his or her views. There may be abuses of these principles by individual faculty, or by institutions that we did not review, but this kind of abuse can occur whether the development of students' moral and civic responsibility are explicit goals of the institution or not. Urging institutions of higher education to be explicit and self-conscious in these efforts, to open their educational practices to public view, and to join a national conversation about these practices with a diverse range of other institutions is more likely to minimize the abuses of power the critics fear than is attempting to run a value-free institution. If pursued thoughtfully, an approach that brings these issues into public debate and discussion should allow us to reappropriate words such as morality, character, patriotism, and social justice across ideological lines and open communication about what they mean and what their implications are for difficult contemporary social issues.

The irony in the charge that moral and civic education imposes arbitrary values on students is that these values-based goals of liberal education are the best protection from indoctrination throughout life. Helping students develop the capacity for critical thinking, teaching them to be open-minded and interested in pursuing ideas, requiring them to back up their claims and to expect others to do the same, and encouraging them to be knowledgeable and accustomed to thinking about moral, civic, and political issues puts them in the strongest position to think independently about their positions and commitments. The more they think about these things and learn to argue them through, the less susceptible they are to indoctrination.

#### Argument: College Is Too Late for Moral and Civic Education

Another common set of objections to moral and civic education at the college level is that college students are now more likely to be seen as adults than they were in the early to mid-twentieth century. As higher education has become accessible to a larger segment of the population, the profile of college students has changed. The dominant template of pre-World War II higher education was private institutions educating full-time students from affluent families in residential settings. This is now a small sector of American undergraduate education. Currently, more than three out of four undergraduates are commuter students.<sup>5</sup> A near-majority of undergraduates today do not come to college or university directly from high school. They are older than their predecessors, work part-time, and are part-time undergraduates. Many are married and are parents. These important realities need to be taken into account as we design college-level programs to foster moral and civic responsibility.

5. U.S. Bureau of the *Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States*: 1998, 118th ed. (Springfield, Va.: National Technical Information Services, 1998).

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This growing age diversity joins another trend toward recognizing college students' adult status. Until the early 1970s, many residential colleges and universities operated in *loco parentis*, that is, were charged with acting in a parental role toward their students by the imposition of curfew hours and rules over a wide range of other behavioral issues. A central purpose of this quasi-parental role was to ensure students' compliance with social and moral norms. As students in the 1960s and 1970s became more politicized, they demanded treatment as adults and much greater autonomy and self-regulation. Within less than a decade, there were few campuses on which the policies of *in loco parentis* were still in effect. This shift, along with the growing diversity in their ages and life situations, means that for many purposes, undergraduate students are now generally considered to be adults rather than adolescents.<sup>6</sup>

This has led critics to argue that by the time students are in college it is too late to affect their values and character, since moral character is assumed to be already fully established by then. There is clear research evidence that this assumption is incorrect. First, with reference to traditional undergraduates of ages eighteen to twenty-two or so, all of the major developmental theorists point to this period, which is often considered to represent the transition to adulthood, as a time of great moral and ideological exploration, ferment, and consolidation.<sup>7</sup> At this time

6. We recognize that, especially since the passage of the GI Bill after World War II, there have always been some older students in American colleges and universities. Even so, until the last several decades the dominant image of college students in the public mind has been that of young people not yet prepared to take responsibility for themselves. Some influential psychological theorists such as Erik Erikson and Marcia called this period a "moratorium" between adolescence and adulthood. See E. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968) and J. E. Marcia, "Identity in Adolescence," in J. Adelson, ed., *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 1980).

7. E. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968); William Perry, Jr. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968); Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984); J. Loevinger, *Ego Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976).

in their lives, young people question their epistemological, moral, political, and religious assumptions, make critical career and other life choices, and rethink their sense of who they are and what is important to them. There could hardly be a time more ripe for moral growth.

For older students, the relevant psychological literature is the extensive work done in recent decades on adult and life span development. Although experiences in childhood and adolescence are clearly important in shaping individuals' moral judgment, identities, and behavior, it is clear that for many people moral development continues well into adulthood. The most sophisticated level of moral thinking in Kohlberg's developmental scheme, postconventional moral judgment, does not occur until early adulthood and continues to increase at least until the end of formal education, even beyond, for those people who continue to participate in activities that challenge their moral thinking.<sup>8</sup>

Parallel findings emerge from studies of moral identity and behavior. In a study of highly committed moral exemplars, William Damon and I found that many of these individuals did not exhibit the exceptional commitment that came to characterize their lives until well into adulthood.<sup>9</sup> For example, we wrote about a woman who was a self-described racist into her thirties who became a leader in the black civil rights movement in her late thirties and early forties through a series of transformative experiences that took place over several years. Similarly, we described a businessman who was financially successful, but rather unremarkable from the moral point of view, who became a tireless advocate for the poor in middle age, establishing and devoting much of his time and energy to a program that provides a broad range of services to low-income people in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia.

8. A. Colby, L. Kohlberg, J. Gibbs and M. Lieberman, "A Longitudinal Study of Moral Judgment," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 48:1-2 (1983). J. Rest, D. Narvaez, M. Bebeau, and S. Thoma, *Postconventional Moral Thinking* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999).

9. A. Colby and W. Damon, *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

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Even if it is possible for people to develop morally in adulthood, some would say that it is presumptuous for institutions of higher education to try to affect the moral understanding and behavior of adult students. In response to this objection, I ask whether it is presumptuous to help undergraduate students think more clearly about challenging moral dilemmas, engage in an intellectually serious way the moral issues that arise in academic disciplines, and participate in service to the community, reflecting on what is learned in the process. And is it presumptuous to ask them to adhere to high ethical standards regarding academic integrity and other issues of honesty and mutual respect within the campus community, become interested in and knowledgeable about contemporary social, policy, and political issues, participate in public discourse and debate regarding campus and community issues, and take advantage of opportunities to act on their most cherished beliefs? Understood in this way, it would seem that moral and civic education is appropriate not only to adults who are attending college but to all adults. Public lectures, community forums, public radio and television, church and political party membership, cultural events such as theater and museum exhibits, self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and interest groups that discuss books and films all provide continuing opportunities for moral and civic growth for adults who are well past their college years. I would go so far as to argue that every institution of society that attempts to deepen individual and collective understanding, including the media, religion, and the arts, has a responsibility to foster moral and civic learning.

Argument: College Students Are Primarily  
Consumers of Vocational Training

Another objection to undergraduate moral and civic education derives from the tendency discussed earlier to see higher education as a commodity purchased by students as an investment in their future earning power. The argument is that students are consumers who want to buy

occupational preparation, not moral and civic education. It is true that students (and their parents) consider career preparation the primary purpose of their undergraduate education, even at small liberal arts colleges.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the overwhelming majority of undergraduates major in a particular discipline because they believe it provides the quickest, safest route to highly paid employment, which has made business the number one major at American colleges and universities. Clearly, vocational preparation is a valid and important goal of higher education, but vocational preparation need not compete with or be disconnected from other goals. Institutions of higher education are well-situated to encourage students to think about a vocation as something larger and potentially far richer than simple careerism. The special nature of colleges and universities as intellectual communities gives them opportunities to embed the occupational goals of students in a broader and more socially meaningful framework.

Vocational preparation should not be treated as an endeavor that is distinct from growth in moral and civic responsibility. Work is central to the lives of most adults, a primary domain in which we have the opportunity to contribute to the welfare of others or to the community more broadly. Work is also one of the two or three most important places where we seek meaning in our lives.<sup>11</sup> For these reasons, it is important to integrate into any educational program a concern for ethical and socially responsible occupational practices and to place students' understanding of their occupation in a larger social and intellectual context for deeper meaning. In effect, higher education can help turn occupations into callings, and they will be better for it.

10. R. H. Hersh and D. Yankelovich, "Intentions and Perceptions: A National Survey of Public Attitudes toward Liberal Arts Education," *Change* 29:2(1997): 16–23.

11. A. Colby, L. Sippola, and E. Phelps, "Social Responsibility and Paid Work in Contemporary American Life," in A. Ross, ed., *Caring and Doing for Others: Social Responsibility in the Domains of Family, Work, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

### Argument: Moral and Civic Education Are Intellectually Weak

A question often raised about undergraduate moral and civic education is whether academic learning suffers if faculty broaden their educational goals in this way. If it is to be effective, this work must be intellectually rigorous and programmatically powerful. In our investigations of curricular and extracurricular programs of moral and civic education, we see many that meet the highest standards of quality. As in other areas of higher education, we also see weak programs. To ensure that this uneven quality does not short-change and alienate students or detract from the credibility of the enterprise, programs of moral and civic education need tough-minded scrutiny even when their goals are unimpeachable. We also need to develop creative tools for assessment research to demonstrate good programs' quality to the range of interested publics and provide the kind of information that will improve ineffective programs.

We believe that this research can demonstrate that the best programs actually have a positive impact on academic learning as well as on moral and civic responsibility. In an evaluation of a large number of service learning programs, Alexander Astin and his colleagues found significant positive effects of participation in service-learning on grade point average, writing skills, and critical thinking skills, as well as commitment to community service, self-efficacy, and leadership ability.<sup>12</sup> Eyler and Giles report research indicating that students' academic performance and self-assessment of their own learning and motivation increases through participation in high quality service-learning programs, especially those that involve challenging service work well in-

12. A. Astin, L. Vogelgesang, E. Ikeda, and J. Yee, "How Service Learning Affects Students: Executive Summary" (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, January, 2000). Retrieved June 1, 2000, from <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/slc/rhowas.html>.

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tegrated with the course material and accompanied by opportunities for structured reflection on their service experience.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, this research shows that the weaker service-learning experiences do not have these positive results. Clearly, quality matters, so we need to develop the tools both to evaluate and ensure the highest quality in all this work.

### Conclusion

It is clear that students' values, moral and civic assumptions, and identities are shaped in college. It is time to be more self-conscious and intentional about this, and to think carefully about the particular framing of goals and strategies that are appropriate and feasible within a given institution. It is also important that faculty and administrators doing this kind of work document what they are doing and make it public so that it can be shared and discussed. This will open specific practices to critique and allow institutions to learn from their own and others' experience. Public scrutiny of these programs is a safeguard against practices that overstep the bounds of what is legitimate and will allow us to develop further the local and national discourse about what should be done and how best to accomplish it. This discourse can also help faculty and students think through dilemmas that arise in moral and civic education on college campuses, such as the tension between spirited debate and concern for others' feelings.

There are many approaches to fostering students' moral and civic responsibility in American higher education. Different conceptions of the goals and different programs of activity, both curricular and extra-curricular, are appropriate to different kinds of institutions. A military academy will conceive of its specific goals quite differently from a community college on an Indian reservation; a nonresidential, public,

13. J. Eyster and D. Giles, *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

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urban university will have a very different approach from that of a small, religiously affiliated liberal arts college. It is important for each institution to build on the best of its own traditions and history as it creates new initiatives. In spite of this diversity, however, there are some common principles that underlie effective moral and civic education, and even institutions that are very different have a great deal to learn from each other.

First, the intellectual core of moral and civic development is critical. This includes not only critical thinking and the capacity to reason about moral and political issues in a sophisticated way (as described developmentally by Kohlberg and others), but also includes deep understanding of many content domains, including our political and economic systems, the fundamentals of ethical concepts in philosophy, and a grasp of American historical and cultural legacies as related to the global context. These are the traditional domains of a liberal arts education, with clear links to moral and civic development.

Second, educators must recognize that cognitive or intellectual dimensions cannot be separated from the dimensions of personal meaning, affect, and motivation in moral and civic education, or in general education. Any effort to focus on the narrowly intellectual alone is self-defeating because it does not result in lasting learning. Ideally, moral and civic education at the college level, as at younger ages, should take a holistic approach that affects the entire environment and its moral atmosphere, creating a campus climate among administration, faculty, and student peer culture that supports the education of the whole person around a core set of shared moral and intellectual concerns. This best ensures the development of routines of moral interpretation and habits of behavior grounded in trustworthiness, mutual respect, open-mindedness, concern for the welfare of others, and active, thoughtful citizenship.

A holistic, multi-faceted approach is especially conducive to creating an enduring identity that incorporates moral and civic concerns. We know this is the key to a strength of commitment that withstands

the inevitable challenges that moral and civic engagement entail. In our study of moral exemplars who sustained exceptional levels of moral commitment over many decades, Bill Damon and I were interested to see that these people did not make sharp distinctions among their personal, professional, and moral goals. Instead, they defined themselves through their moral goals and fully integrated what they wanted personally with what they thought was right. Cabell Brand, the businessman who developed anti-poverty programs around Roanoke, Virginia, expressed his sense of moral and personal integration when I asked, “When you think about these moral goals and values and so on, how do these relate to your sense of who you are as a person?” He responded, “Well, it’s one and the same. Who I am is what I’m able to do and how I feel all the time—each day, each moment . . . It’s hard for me to separate who I am from what I want to do and what I am doing [in these programs].”<sup>14</sup> Mother Waddles, an African-American woman who established a mission for the low-income communities of Detroit, sounded remarkably like Brand, the wealthy white entrepreneur. In talking about the stability of her commitment to this work, she said, “Because I didn’t promise that I would do it contingent upon what kind of building, what kind of clothes I could wear, what kind of money I had; just as long as I can find something I can do, I’ll do it. So no matter where I am going, people can at least know to pinpoint me in what category I’m in. Without even asking, ‘I know wherever she is, if she’s alive and well, she’s a missionary.’ So I think that’s my greatest achievement—to find yourself and know who you are, and get joy out of being you.”<sup>15</sup>

People at this high level of commitment have found ways to integrate the things that inspire them and the things they want to accomplish and to build these into their core sense of who they are. This results not only in outstanding service to others but also in an exceptional degree

14. See Colby and Damon (1992): 304.

15. *Ibid.*, 218.

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of personal well-being and fulfillment for the exemplars themselves. Many people never achieve this level of personal integration. Developing a fully integrated life is one of the most challenging psychological tasks of adulthood. In older forms, which often began from a spiritual base and treated one's life work as a calling, this was accepted as a legitimate part of the agenda for higher education. It is now time to redefine this earlier vision in a contemporary framework and hold colleges and universities accountable for a fuller conception of the educated person.