



# NACU

The New American Colleges & Universities

*Connect  
Collaborate  
Champion*

## EDUCATING FOR CIVIC PROFESSIONALISM

### **A NACU & Kettering Foundation Research Project**

Final Report: Fall 2021

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*NACU continued its partnership with the Kettering Foundation on their Educating for Civic Professionalism initiative. In this research study, NACU examined the public impact of specific disciplines within higher education, how professionals can work in partnership with their communities, and how institutions can best prepare their students to be civic professionals.*

The New American Colleges and Universities (NACU) is comprised of private institutions dedicated to the purposeful integration of liberal education, professional studies, and civic engagement. They are like-minded and like-missioned, representing 24 institutions nationally that do not compete for students, including two Historically Black Colleges and Universities and two Hispanic Serving Institutions. Collectively, their 6,000 faculty educate more than 100,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

Our campuses include: Belmont University, California Lutheran University, Calvin University, Chatham University, Drury University, Florida Southern College, Hamline University, Hampton University, Linfield University, Manhattan College, Merrimack College, Moravian University, Nazareth College, North Central College, Ohio Northern University, Queens University of Charlotte, Roger Williams University, Russell Sage College, Simmons University, Tuskegee University, University of La Verne, University of New Haven, Virginia Wesleyan University, and Wagner College.

NACU's mission is *to connect our campuses to collaborate in the delivery of innovative ideas and to champion the belief that an integrated liberal, professional, and civic education is essential to the future of our world.* We execute on our mission by administering a collegiate network of research and learning that transforms academics at NACU campuses. This includes developing and managing a series of professional development programs for faculty and academic leadership, among numerous other research projects and learning activities. These offerings create an exchange of knowledge and practice among colleagues that results in the sharing of curriculum, pedagogy, and research that elevates the effectiveness of an integrated NACU education.

## ***Kettering Partnership and Research***

In 2020, NACU partnered with the Kettering Foundation on its initiative *Educating for Civic Professionalism*. Phase one of the collaboration included research on NACU chief academic officers' understanding of civic professionalism and how their campuses are developing civic professionals through curriculum and other methods of engagement. **The project produced a report that outlined six key findings:**

- 1. The majority of NACU CAOs were not familiar with the formal language and scholarship of civic professionalism.**
- 2. CAOs had a strong interest to learn more about the scholarship of civic professionalism.**
- 3. Civic engagement was embedded in the mission, priorities, and current pedagogies.**
- 4. Civic professionalism differentiated itself from civic engagement at a few campuses.**
- 5. Ethos of civic professionalism was intrinsic to certain disciplines over others.**
- 6. Common leadership strategies for advancing academic concepts on campus could be employed to educate faculty about civic professionalism.**

NACU shared the final report with its campuses and other colleagues. Further, NACU presented the phase one findings at the Council of Independent Colleges 2020 Chief Academic Officers Institute. Over 50 participants in the presentation found the work compelling and asked probing questions to learn more. In advance of the presentation, NACU created a [Civic Professionalism](#) resource page which was publicized to attendees and its campuses.

Also, following the phase one research, NACU interviewed Harry Boyte, father of citizen professionalism, for the NACU Podcast *Connect, Collaborate, Champion!* The episode with Boyte can be [found here](#) for your listening pleasure. The episode has been downloaded nearly 100 times since its launch and continues to attract new listeners each month.

### *Phase Two Summary of Activities*

In phase two of the research project with the Kettering Foundation, NACU pursued a deeper conversation with two of its campuses and created the opportunity to work more closely with faculty and students as part of the second research stage. NACU, first, identified two of its campuses where provosts expressed strong interest in working with faculty to strengthen and support academic programs that prepare students for careers as civic professionals. Second, we worked with the provosts to identify a

faculty lead to participate on a research team with the NACU staff. Once the team was set, we met several times during the 2021 spring and summer semesters to flesh out a set of activities that included interviewing faculty and students with the following questions:

- **What is the public impact of specific disciplines within higher education?**
- **How can professionals in various disciplines work together with lay citizens as partners (with independent agency and capacities) rather than clients (to be acted upon)?**
- **How can professional or preprofessional education in higher education prepare future professionals for this kind of work?**
- **How can provosts best promote the goal of preparing students to act as civic professionals? What efforts to introduce these concepts to faculty or to promote pedagogical experimentation are most promising?**

However, we modified the questions, making them specific to the disciplines of the faculty and students that we interviewed. By modifying the questions, we helped the participants feel more comfortable as they identified with the questions and content. In other words, the research became more personalized to their discipline and, consequently, more meaningful. The research team included an accounting professor and a music education professor. This provided diverse engagements and perspectives with faculty and students in the arts and business.

The research team used several methods for gathering perspectives on civic professionalism, which included: a) interviews with faculty and students; b) survey research of faculty; and c) in-class activities with students.

## ***Reflection on the Experience***

Before sharing the results of the research, we wanted to reflect on the overall experience and provide a few thoughts on what worked, what did not work, and what we might do differently next time. In terms of what worked, one thing that stands out is that we've come to realize that the research process itself has turned into an education strategy about *civic professionalism*. During this experience, it was clear that the more we talked about civic professionalism with faculty colleagues, the more comfortable they became with adopting the language. The initial tension created when we first introduced the concepts, which we will comment on shortly, were alleviated over time. Plus, we found that continued conversation about the subject eased faculty and they themselves in the conversations

started adopting the language of civic professionalism as part of their descriptions of engaged teaching and learning. Faculty recognized its value as both a pedagogy and a way for students and faculty to work closely with their communities on common challenges. Like the phase one research, as faculty learn about civic professionalism, they started to view it as a tenet at the core of their teaching and learning, but a tenet that had not been voiced. They viewed civic professionalism as “the hidden curriculum” and an expected outcome of an education at a NACU campus. This observation echoed the findings from phase one with provosts. The provosts had a similar experience in which “civic professionalism” become defined for them what they have been working toward as an outcome at their campuses.

Additionally, when talking to the provosts at the two campuses on this study, they maintained the view that the language was very accurate in its description and goals, but still not prevalent amongst academics. Since phase one, the provosts in this second study have increased their efforts to mainstream, if you will, the language on their campuses. They have enthusiastically and publicly supported faculty that have self-selected to pursue civic professionalism in their disciplines. Furthermore, they have brought the language into their discussions about academic priorities.

On the flipside, while we experienced the research process as a promising strategy for educating faculty about concepts and practices, we found consistently that “civic professionalism” terminology was confusing to many at first. For most, it was the first time they were hearing the word “professionalism” tied to the term “civic.” Of course, they had heard and understood *civic engagement*, which holds specific meaning for them. For this reason, we found that it was best to provide a basic definition that helped reduce confusion from the onset. In short, we knew providing the basic definition of civic professionalism along with concrete examples of faculty taking this approach with their teaching and learning proved to be helpful in advancing the discussion.

In terms of what did not work, it seems too obvious to state that COVID impacted the research, but we feel the need to put this fact in writing. The pandemic has changed teaching and learning. The typical engagements between a campus and its community have been halted, presenting an ongoing challenge for faculty who collaborate with community partners. One of the participating campuses was in a COVID hotspot over the summer, creating additional tension for their local community. We sensed that the

pandemic had dampened faculty’s moods about community-engaged scholarship. However, we think that once we move beyond the pandemic, faculty would be more open to the concept of really working as co-collaborators with community and citizens as they recognized the value of this work for their own sense of purpose and, of course, their students and their local communities.

While these current conditions impacted teaching and learning and altered the moods of students and faculty, including the research team, we decided to accelerate the project by leaning in sooner rather than waiting for the pandemic to subside. Hence, we started the conversations in the spring 2021 semester and continued them into the summer 2021 term. If we could do it again, we would rather spend the fall and spring semesters working with faculty and students minus the global pandemic.

As noted earlier, the research process served as a strategy for educating participants about civic professionalism. This was also true for the researchers. The faculty involved directly on the research team became more interested in civic professionalism and intrigued with the idea of incorporating this approach into more of their classes in the future. They reflected on how it could serve as a teaching tool in their own classrooms and, more importantly, how it could serve to strengthen the relationships between the students they are developing into young professionals and the citizens of their local communities. The process changed them by asking them to both individually and with colleagues think deeply about the public impact of their disciplines. In future research, it would be important to scale this reflective practice. By this, we mean increase the scale of participation both in terms of the number of participants and the quantity of disciplines. In short, it may be effective to turn this reflection into a conference setting – presenting an open call around the question: ***What is the public impact of your specific discipline?*** This would be an effective strategy for advancing the understanding of civic professionalism across disciplines and campuses.

Another thought for future consideration is to focus, equally, on the student side and challenge students to reflect on the public impact of their selected disciplines. The faculty researchers are finding that with each passing year the entering students are wired to do this type of work. They are looking for purpose in their education and their careers and arrive highly conscientious of their role in society. They are thinking in terms of social justice and are quick to add ideas and suggestions for improving social impact in their studies

than previous generations. Also, they are interested in getting to know the communities that they live in with the hopes of finding new and better ways to serve others.

Maybe, if we continue along this line of thinking of addressing the public impact of academic disciplines, the ideal scenario is for faculty, students, and local citizens to engage in a discussion on public impact. While a conference, as noted, is a favorable academic tradition for presenting this work, the process itself is a worthy engagement that perpetuates the conversation for the local community and campus.

### **Findings in the Research**

In this second phase of research, we spoke with chief academic officers, music education and business faculty, and both graduate and undergraduate students. In addition to face-to-face and virtual meetings, we created a Qualtrics-based survey that sought to identify attitudes and beliefs about civic engagement and civic professionalism as well as preferences for suggested activities that might enhance the development of civic professionalism-based experiences at the college. For the interviews, we modified the original phase two research questions for this specific discipline. For example, for music education, the questions read:

- **What is the public impact of music education?**
- **In what ways might music educators work with people outside of the profession in cooperative way(s) to achieve mutually desirable outcomes?**
- **From a position of privilege, how can we use our professional knowledge and skills to “improve the human condition”?**
- **What program or curricular changes might need to be in place to support Civic Professionalism? Could an experience be embedded into a course, seminar? If so, in what way(s)?**

During these face-to-face discussions, faculty were eager to learn more about civic professionalism as well as strategies for successful integration into degree program experiences. They were openly thinking about the questions and ways that degree programs might be able to integrate discourse and possible experiences to resolve those questions.

In general, faculty acknowledged that today’s students appeared more aware of contemporary issues related to the pandemic, social well-being, privilege, diversity, equity, and inclusion. One faculty member

spoke at length about awareness of undergraduates in a previously taught course about the social, cultural, and ethical expectations associated with teaching music that might take place “outside of the music classroom.” Students may be more aware of these issues due to campus communications and in conversations in liberal arts courses outside the discipline.

In a discussion with students about civic professionalism, one student suggested that during fieldwork experiences, “we” could be encouraged to learn more about the community being served. The student suggested that reaching out to community-based organizations and seeing them as collaborators could support the expectations associated with civic professionalism. In fact, this fall the student teaching cohorts plan to engage with the surrounding communities of their school placements to better learn about and build relationships with the citizens from these areas. This approach will help students think about their placements differently, moving from a perceived *expert* of music education to a citizen with a role within the community. Another student suggested that connecting with area community-based organizations would facilitate an expanded understanding of advocacy, not only for arts education in the schools but for the goals and activities of those community-based organizations.

A few students mentioned the potential disconnect between the ideals of civic professionalism and the lack of awareness about it in area school districts as well as ways to resolve this issue. One of the concerns was that due to the current pandemic, school districts have many pressing issues to manage right now. One possible solution, according to one of the students, was to focus on a partnership between a campus organization and an area school district. Putting together a joint-sponsored meeting/forum where high school students and college students could explore the idea of civic professionalism, what it means in general, what it means to music education, and what it means as a way for co-learning. This effort could help build awareness as well as gauge where young people are with their own understanding of the role of their future professions.

Phase two of the civic professional research also focused on business as a discipline. As business is one of the most common majors in US universities, the direct impact of infusing civic professionalism into curricular and co-curricular experiences would be beneficial for students and their communities. Business education also impacts all areas of society from for-profit to non-profit and every aspect of the supply chain. Business

decisions require ethical considerations, and hopefully a business education will help increase ethical conduct and an openness to the changes in the future.

While we focused on speaking with business faculty, the findings were like those in music education. The faculty saw a strong connection with civic professionalism as it was their personal desire to strengthen relationships with local citizens. Furthermore, the business school's mission emphasizes ethical leadership. It is the institution's desire that students will be able to recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas in society and to approach business education to have a positive impact on society and help those that are less fortunate. Furthermore, the purpose of capitalism ideally is to match those with the ideas to improve society with those that have the financial means to support these endeavors. The products and services that evolve from these interactions improve everyone's standard of living. Business educators believe knowledge is power, but the current social environment has caused us to question knowledge and information itself. It would be beneficial to start trying to help the younger generation understand financial literacy and its social impact while studying business. At the end of the day, an education that included civic professionalism would lead to developing graduates eager to improve the human condition.

Faculty recognized the importance of including some element of civic professionalism in the core learning experience. Since the business school requires students to take a class in civic engagement, faculty saw this as an opportunity to introduce civic professionalism into the learning and improve the activity-based learning experiences that are already prevalent at the college. For example, the student finance club partners with Junior Achievement to provide financial literacy education to at-risk lower income elementary children. While this is a beneficial service, everyone agreed more could be done for students to connect with local citizens and work with them to solve problems instead of focusing on simply providing the expert service. Similarly, this question arose when thinking about the annual tax preparation services that are provided by students. Beyond providing the service, students and faculty could think of this as an avenue to building strong relationships with citizens.

In addition to interviewing business and music faculty and music education students, one of our researchers also conducted a survey with undergraduate and graduate students. The survey included questions that clarified whether students were (a) aware of civic engagement and civic professionalism

practices on campus and (b) their interest level in activities that might support civic professionalism. In addition, there was a textbox for students to share additional information.

The survey results provide additional insight into the perspective of students. For example, we learned that less than fifty percent of the survey participants have completed a civic engagement experience in college. The reasons varied. One common reason included first-year students not permitted to complete offsite civic engagement activities during the last academic year due to the pandemic. The pandemic shut down the campus-community learning experiences, unfortunately, along with the rest of the devastation it caused and continues to cause for our world. Also, we found it common that newly arriving graduate students in music education had not participated in civic activities at their undergraduate colleges. However, one hundred percent of the students, undergraduate and graduate, responded they "believed that music educators should be involved in their communities outside of their school" and they were "interested in learning more about civic professionalism."

The survey results indicated that professional organizations could increase awareness and opportunities for students to not only learn more about civic professionalism, but to engage in experiences that support it. The most frequent type of engagement selected by the music education students was "providing musical events to the community." Professors and professional organizations could increase awareness and opportunities for students to learn more about civic professionalism and think beyond literal forms of engagement such as musical events in the community. For instance, music educators and students perform in many venues which allows the community to be part of the musical experience. Community members and ensemble members take pride in the success of these types of activities. As far as the public impact, several cited the value of improved communications with community members who attend events. This creates a community of participants accessible to all who attend typical events such as concerts or other types of music programming.

Additionally, below is a rank order list of responses to "which ways might be helpful in learning more about civic professionalism" that illustrates the mindset of these students participating in the survey:

1. Providing musical events to the community

2. Getting to know the community members around your school and learning about the issues that they are dealing with
3. Having music education organizations like New York State Music Association and National Association for Music Education can provide more information about civic professionalism
4. Talking with students in a school to get to know more about their day-to-day lives outside of the school day
5. Having professors provide opportunities for students to learn more about civic professionalism
6. Invite community organizations to meet with campus-based organizations
7. Meet with leaders of community-based organizations
8. Professional organizations should provide conference sessions about civic professionalism; that way I can learn more about it
9. Working with campus organizations to better serve the needs of the community
10. Professors can provide Civic Professionalism-type experiences for students
11. Seek out my own opportunities to learn more about community-based issues

There is a sense of optimism in the survey findings as responses indicate an interest to learn more about civic professionalism and develop new avenues for knowing community members and working with them on issues that are important to them. Based on the comments and choices students made in the survey, several observations emerged. We saw the desire for: a) students to talk with other students to learn more about their day-to-day lives outside of school; b) campuses and community-based organizations to be brought together around common interests; c) and campus organizations to work better to serve the needs of local citizens. While not surprising, these desires expressed by students are a reminder of the role campus supports can take to facilitate activities on their campuses that build bridges to local citizens. More so, this is a reminder of the importance of co-creating learning experiences with local communities that are mutually beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

As we discovered, educating for civic professionalism is an ongoing process that needs to reach new groups of academic leaders, faculty, and students. Each time we take on a new project, we find that the people we talked to are drawn to the concept

of civic professionalism and its impact on learning and society. At first, there is initial confusion around the language or concerns by faculty that civic professionalism is another pedagogy that will consume too much time to integrate into the syllabus. However, once passed these initial responses, there is usually a strong attraction by faculty and students to learn more and to work with us on imagining the possibilities for learning with and about local citizens.

Furthermore, it has been a rewarding experience to have the opportunity through this research to strengthen connections with other faculty, learning about their professions and how they approach them and, at the same time, learning about their personal passions and views of life and society. This occurred between the faculty on the research team and the NACU staff. Beyond the immediate research team, of course, the faculty researchers on the team also developed stronger relationships with faculty across their own departments and with their own students due to this research project.

While the building of relationships through a research project is not the reason for the engagement, it is a value-added benefit of team research and a valuable outcome of the project. It is an important unintended consequence that helps build bridges between people. For this reason, we found the research process to be in harmony with civic professionalism. In other words, fundamentally civic professionalism is about building relationships. In the numerous conversations we organized about civic professionalism with the faculty and students, the discussions all pivoted around a variety of relationships forming a relationship matrix. The matrix included: *people to people, professions to people, professions to communities, faculty to faculty, faculty to student, student to student, faculty and student to local citizens*, and so forth. The results of these relationship and connections co-created opportunities for learning, finding purpose in education, and becoming an engaged citizen.

The new and varied connections, in our case, led to new opportunities for faculty involved in this project. For example, because of this research project, one of the faculty members on the research team has been asked to deliver a campus-wide presentation to faculty about civic professionalism. The session will highlight the pilot program that will take place in the fall classes as well as an overview of civic professionalism and ways to integrate tenets of this model into courses and co-curriculars.

Furthermore, one of the researchers wrote a short piece on civic professionalism and music education, which is being published in the state journal *School Music News* to build awareness and further discourse. Also, the researchers are looking at other ways to advance civic professionalism on their campuses that includes continuing to meet with faculty to explore ways to integrate lessons on developing civic professionalism into their degree programs.

These outcomes, and probably others that we are not aware of, resulted from the direct engagement in this phase two research project. Hence, it is our goal to continue to work with the Kettering Foundation to find new and different ways for educating for civic professionalism and create future opportunities for NACU to work closely with its faculty and campuses.