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Lessons in Citizenship: Using Collaboration in the Classroom to Build Community, Foster Academic Integrity, and Model Civic Responsibility

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The rise in academic integrity violations and the connection between dishonest behavior in college and civic behavior after graduation signal a call to educators that more should be done to prepare students to be ethical, responsible citizens. Through collaboration, particularly on written projects for their peers, students can feel more a part of an academic community and realize its many virtues. The author explores how collective authoring models the complex dimensions of responsible citizenship, which are often overlooked during the undergraduate experience, and can better prepare students to participate in their civic communities with honesty and integrity.

Many colleges and universities today spend considerable effort motivating students to become ethical, engaged citizens by promoting a campus culture of personal responsibility and trust. Indeed, many educators would agree that citizenship development is a critical goal of higher education. More than a decade ago, the Association of American Colleges and Universities described in their Greater Expectations report (2002) a “new vision of learning,” stating that higher education was a contribution to a civic society and, therefore, a public good. The report delineated the competencies that universities should foster in students, including intellectual honesty, a sense of responsibility for society and social justice, active participation in democracy as citizens, a respect for others’ thoughts and feelings, and an understanding of the consequences...
of actions, including ethical consequences. At institutions of higher education that promote these competencies remarkably well, such as Haverford College in Pennsylvania, academic integrity and civic responsibility are a fundamental part of the institution’s mission and identity. At many colleges and universities, mission statements, honor codes, and academic integrity policies send students the message that the academic culture is self-governing, and that people act with honesty, responsibility, and trust. However, research suggests that many efforts to promote integrity and responsible citizenship are failing. In particular, scholars have noted a disturbing decline in academic integrity that is reflected in a rise in cheating on college campuses (Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996; Love & Simmons, 1998; McCabe, 2001, 2005, 2009; McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2001). Much more can be done to promote a culture of integrity on our campuses and to lay the groundwork for students’ future behavior as citizens. In particular, by working collaboratively to form an academic community inside the classroom, students can model what it means to participate as honest, responsible, and respectful members of a civic community.

Building an Academic Community of Trust: Truth Versus Reality

From the outset of the college experience, first-year students typically are encouraged to read their campus codes of conduct in the student handbook, including policies regarding cheating, plagiarism, and appropriate campus behavior. Some schools ask incoming students to recite or sign an honor code, an act that helps underscore the “community of trust” (Thornton & Jaeger, 2007, p. 15) that exists in a college culture characterized by a strong social compact. Rituals, artwork, myths, ceremonies, artifacts, and other aspects of culture also help shape the belief among students that they are part of a sacred academic community built on trust and social responsibility (Magolda, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2001; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006, 2007; Whitt, 1993; Young, 1999). Stories of those who have acted honorably, such as for social justice causes, can be passed on through the years, serving as positive influences to students’ attitudes and behavior (Magolda, 2000; Thornton & Jaeger, 2007). In their ethnographic study of how institutional beliefs and culture contribute to students’ development as responsible citizens, Thornton and Jaeger (2006) suggested that “By supporting programmatic and procedural changes related to civic responsibility development, institutions communicate to students that this type of development is important” (p. 53).
Despite these efforts, mounting evidence suggests that students are not getting the message, or if they are, it’s not being taken seriously. For example, a study of 2,000 students at the University of Arizona presented at the 2012 Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) conference found that two out of three students admitted to having cheated (Baldasare & Washington White, 2012). Interestingly, the higher the year in school, the greater the likelihood that a student would cheat (Baldasare & Washington White, 2012). In a more extensive study surveying more than 40,000 undergraduates over a span of two years, McCabe (2005) found that 21% admitted to at least one incident of serious cheating. Fifty-one percent said they had cheated on written work; four out of five of these students admitted to cheating by plagiarizing Internet sources or submitting a purchased paper (McCabe, 2005). In a 2007 study of 154 students at Southern Illinois University, researchers found that 85% admitted to engaging in academic dishonesty (Lovett-Hooper, Komarraju, Weston, & Dollinger, 2007). Of important note, this study showed a significant correlation between dishonesty in college, such as plagiarizing Internet sources or submitting a purchased paper, and dishonest behavior later in life. The findings lend support to the notion that a lack of academic integrity in college may be a predictor of future dishonesty. In other words, “individuals who engage in academically dishonest behavior may not stop doing so once they leave college” (Lovett-Hooper et al., 2007, p. 332). These findings should be of considerable interest to those concerned about the connection between undergraduate academic integrity and civic responsibility later in life.

The ubiquitous nature of technology and information in students’ lives today may be impacting their ethical behavior, particularly regarding the use of outside sources in their academic writing. DeVoss and Rosati (2002) argued that students sometimes plagiarize because they have trouble distinguishing their own ideas from those of their sources, and the authors question whether we ask too much of students to navigate this dynamic. They suggested that students become confused when a source, such as one found on the Internet, lacks certain criteria like an author, page numbers, or publication dates, elements that commonly signal to students that a print-based source is credible and should be cited (DeVoss & Rosati, 2002). Likewise, sometimes students think information found online, such as on Wikipedia, is collectively authored and is, thus, common knowledge, so that citation is not needed (Gabriel, 2010).

Although undergraduates may study ethical behavior in their philosophy and ethics courses (or be exposed to these concepts in other courses), the issue of what constitutes ethical behavior in their own culture is increasingly complicated not only by technology, but also by the rising
number of very public reports of unethical conduct outside of academics. These incidents, in music, art, journalism, publishing, and film (see Armstrong, 1991; Kulish, 2010; Lethem 2007; McKinley, 2011; Rieder, 2003; Vega, 2011) as well as in business and politics (see Dionne, 1987; Karasz, 2012; Sauer, 2011), can lead to the perception that certain types of dishonest behavior are more permissible because they have become commonplace.

The remarkable and frequently reported lapses in ethical behavior and decision making by corporate executives, political leaders, and celebrities certainly encourage this debate, suggesting that more needs to be done to make the connection between academics and citizenship. Martin, Rao, and Sloan (2009) examined the relationship between workplace deviance and plagiarism in college, and, unlike much research on plagiarism, which relies on self-reported data, theirs involved examining student papers and Turnitin originality reports. They found a similar story: Sixty-one percent of the 151 student papers analyzed were plagiarized. Further, they noted that students who rated themselves high on integrity and responsibility “were significantly more likely to plagiarize than those who did not” (Martin et al., 2009, p. 46). These findings, the researchers conclude, may suggest that students who plagiarize actually perceive themselves to be “more stable, responsible, and as having more self-control and integrity than those participants who did not plagiarize” (Martin et al., 2009, p. 47). They reason that their results may reflect the attitude that plagiarism has become so commonplace that participants saw nothing wrong with their dishonest behavior (Martin et al., 2009).

Throughout their many years of study on plagiarism and student source use, Howard and her colleagues (1999, 2010) have focused on the reasons why students may inadvertently plagiarize and why, increasingly, students are finding it difficult to incorporate sources, particularly digital sources, into their own writing. This research, most recently evidenced in the work of the Citation Project (n.d.), illuminates some of the key problems that surface when we ask students to incorporate source information into their own papers. Students may not see themselves as part of an academic community that values individual scholarship (Blum, 2009; Howard, 1999). Here, too, one can infer that even if students are inadvertently cheating, they do not understand the responsibility inherent in participation in a community (in this case a community of learners) or the correlation between their actions in college and how responsible citizens participate in their communities.

We all want our students to act ethically and responsibly. However, an equally fundamental goal of higher education involves encouraging students to become active, engaged participants in their communities. One
measure of how effectively colleges and universities communicate this can be seen in research on civic participation, which suggests that post-secondary students today are more disengaged with their communities, both before and after graduation than previous generations. For example, in Sax’s (2000) study to assess trends related to this issue, a sharp decline was noted in students’ interest in politics since the 1960s, a trend that can be seen as “evidence of political disengagement” (p. 6). Although Sax found a rise in the amount of first-year student volunteerism, perhaps related to volunteer requirements in high school and an increasing number of service-learning opportunities in college, the study showed a drop in students’ commitment to helping others and in their participation as responsible citizens in the years following college graduation. The findings suggest that “the effects of college on students’ altruistic or community orientations may, in fact, only be temporary” (Sax, 2000, p. 15).

Consequently, although a wealth of research exists that focuses on how administrators and student affairs professionals can help create and shape a campus culture of civic responsibility and engagement, an important question to consider is whether enough is being done in higher education to teach students to participate responsibly in the highly collaborative environments of their future. Much literature focuses on the explicit and implicit messages students should receive about responsible citizenship on campus (see Ehrlich, 2000; Magolda, 2000; Schneider, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2001; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006, 2007; Whitt, 1993; Young, 1999). However, if cheating is becoming more commonplace (and, some would argue, contagious) and increases with a student’s year in college, it behooves educators to explore new ways to address issues related to honesty, responsibility, and academic integrity. Likewise, if we agree that a fundamental goal of higher education is to develop civically engaged graduates, then perhaps we can better address the apparent declines in civic participation by rethinking how we deliver these messages inside the classroom.

Using Learning Communities to Model Civic Engagement

In Ehrlich’s (2000) book Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, he defined civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities” (p. vi), and he noted that “A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and, therefore, considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own” (p. xxvi). One way educators have tried to impart the values inherent in this concept is through the growing use of student
Learning communities. Learning communities are typically defined as classes or groups that are linked or clustered, sometimes around a theme, providing a supportive network that brings people together in meaningful ways (Levine Laufgraben & Shapiro, 2004). Cross (1998) described the growing interest in learning communities as a “fundamental revolution in epistemology” (p. 7) that moves us away from a focus on hierarchies, competitiveness, and passivity. Thus, learning communities are a natural fit with the conceptual transformation in pedagogy from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered paradigm, as these kinds of communities can engage students by moving them from passive to active learning, a change that has been associated with deeper learning and integration of course material (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Learning communities may be one way to “bridge the gap between what students bring to college and what they expect to take with them when they leave” (Levine Laufgraben & Shapiro, 2004, p. 9). The logic of engaging students in cooperative, active learning communities makes remarkable sense when one considers the myriad of complex challenges students face each day both inside and outside their classrooms, challenges that are likely to multiply when they enter their civic communities and the workforce. As citizens, they will be exposed to a complex, globally dynamic world that will demand not only higher levels of thinking and reflection, but also an appreciation of how to collaborate responsibly in diverse systems and spaces. Collaborative, integrative learning communities are an excellent way to give students direct experience navigating teamwork challenges, building relationships, and appreciating alternative viewpoints (in other words, exposing them to the real work of community).

To some, learning communities provide a way for students to ascend the levels of intellectual development posited by Perry (1970), enabling them to advance from a dualistic (right or wrong) view of knowledge to higher levels that recognize knowledge as more nuanced and relativistic. Researchers Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) argued that “ways of knowing” for many, particularly for women, involve a sense of connectedness, which is undoubtedly at the very heart of the learning community experience. Regardless of whether one believes that knowledge is socially constructed or that it exists waiting to be discovered, learning communities can offer an effective way for people collaboratively to construct or discover knowledge about their world.

Although learning communities may expose students to the notion of responsible, engaged collaboration, they are not a panacea for a variety of reasons. In particular, organizing and sustaining campus-wide learning communities involves extensive administrator and student coordination.
That level of collaboration runs counter to many cultural norms of those raised in the United States or other low-context cultures. These highly individualistic societies strongly emphasize personal needs and accomplishments over those of the group (Hall, 1976). Likewise, the dominant organization culture of academia throughout the history of U.S. higher education has been anything but collectivist. Rather than being structured to support collaboration, our institutions are organized into “departmental silos, bureaucratic/hierarchical administrative units, unions and other rigid structures” (Kezar, 2005, p. 832) that serve as barriers to communication and collaboration. Stein and Short (2001) argued that teaching is typically considered a solitary activity, and university-wide reward structures for teaching and publication can impede collaborative efforts. Consequently, teamwork does not come easily to faculty members, “who have spent significant portions of their careers working autonomously or competing with peers for resources” (Stein & Short, 2001, p. 422). Indeed, the cultural climate on campus for students and educators alike can inhibit the success of a learning community and add to the challenges of teaching responsible citizenship. Ehrlich (2000) noted that “The consequences of this cultural climate include a growing sense that Americans are not responsible for or accountable to each other; a decline in civility, mutual respect, and tolerance; and the preeminence of self-interest and individual preference over concern for the common good” (p. xxii).

Thus, although learning communities can do much to model civic engagement, because of the organizational and cultural dynamics of U.S. higher education, they cannot solely be relied upon to teach students the importance of responsible, ethical civic engagement. Particularly given the extent of academic integrity violations and concerns in recent years about a rise in student incivility, far more can be done inside the classroom to convey and model what it means to participate as citizens in community.

**Collaboration Beyond the Learning Community**

Any time students are taught how effectively to navigate the process of teamwork in the classroom—across the disciplines—they can begin to learn many of the skills required for responsible, ethical community engagement. For example, when students collaborate well, they can become more sensitive to others’ ideas, wants, and needs. They build relationships, learn to negotiate, and develop conflict resolution skills. Effective collaboration demands an ability to listen actively, manage one’s emotions, and respect others (Kezar & Lester, 2009). In other words, good collaborators are those who not only are willing to learn new things but also are willing
to understand “disparate perspectives” (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 198) so that a “collective vision emerges” (Kezar & Carducci, 2009, p. 9).

Ehrlich (2000) suggested that “education should foster the development of moral reasoning and the adoption of viewpoints and commitments that emerge from reasoned consideration and democratic principles” (p. xxv). College, he said, should be a place where students can explore competing values open-mindedly, using a combination of their own moral reasoning and knowledge to arrive at what they believe about an issue. Considering the remarkable rise in the number of international students on college campuses today, there is a growing likelihood that students will be exposed to dramatically different perspectives in the classroom. Participation on collaborative team projects will likely involve working with students from other backgrounds and cultures and navigating the additional challenges this can present. Collaboration with diverse team members is a way for students to “come to recognize the legitimacy of experiences and perspectives very different from their own” (Schneider, 2000, p. 112). Virtues such as fairness, respect, and civic responsibility can be collectively fostered; however, Levine Laufgraben and Shapiro (2004) cautioned that “Unless students grasp the difference between knowing and understanding and learn to be flexible and responsive to a complex and changing world, higher education will not fulfill its role in preparing the next generation for an uncertain future” (p. 12). Collaboration inside the classroom, therefore, can mean grappling with many of the basic responsibilities and challenges of citizenry writ small. Learning to work effectively in diverse groups and to navigate the challenges of effective teamwork helps students become better leaders, negotiators, communicators, and team players—all qualities that are highly valued in today’s workplaces.

Collaborative Writing to Model the Dimensions of Responsible Citizenship

In their work on the ceremonies and symbols of citizenship on campus, Thornton and Jaeger (2006, 2007) described five dimensions of responsible citizenship that typically are addressed during the college years: (1) Students begin to understand democracy and its values, (2) Students begin acting for the benefit of a community, (3) Students develop an appreciation for diversity, (4) Students realize their knowledge can be used to benefit a community, and (5) Students develop a sense of personal responsibility to the community. With the first dimension, students begin to understand the workings of democracy and its values. Next, students
“display a desire to act beneficially in community and for its members” (Thornton & Jaeger, 2007, p. 17). Students develop an appreciation for diversity and those unlike themselves in the third dimension, and then they begin realizing that their knowledge can be used for the community’s benefit. Finally, students develop a sense of personal accountability. It is in this final dimension of responsible citizenship that students begin to consider “academic integrity, drinking, and other issues that involve the implications of one person’s actions in the lives of others” (Thornton & Jaeger, 2007, p. 17).

Applying Thornton and Jaeger’s theoretical framework (2006, 2007) to what typically occurs in the classroom, it is perhaps not so surprising that research is showing a decline in academic integrity and civic responsibility. If one becomes truly accountable for his or her actions only in the fifth and final dimension of responsible citizenship, we are perhaps asking too much of students that they reach an advanced understanding of academic integrity and responsibility in their first or even second year of college. Perhaps more active teaching and learning needs to occur before we can expect undergraduates fully to grasp the significance of what it means to be personally accountable for their actions. Students may first need to develop an understanding of what engaging in community means, cultivate a desire to benefit their community, truly appreciate the diversity that exists in the community, and realize how knowledge can be used to benefit the community.

In first- and second-year composition courses, for example, considerable attention typically is focused on Thornton and Jaeger’s (2006, 2007) first dimension, as students are taught the “democratic” systems and conventions that are used in academic writing. Instructors attempt to teach students the rules of citation and nearly always include stern warnings about plagiarism and its consequences. Some use plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin punitively, to “catch” those who do not quote and cite correctly; others use the tool more proactively, to help students see how their documents should be revised to comply with the rules. In either case, even if students learn the complicated rules of academic source citation, they are rarely encouraged through their coursework to advance to Thornton and Jaeger’s four more nuanced dimensions of responsible citizenship. In composition and other writing-intensive courses, when the focus turns to writing research papers, students may learn to look for opposing viewpoints on the issues they address and often to weigh the pros and cons of each argument. However, they still concentrate more on developing individual research and writing skills than on thinking about how their words will impact their readers. Their focus is not on
navigating the complex perspectives involved in collaborative, community-based writing. Student academic writing, particularly if it is not team based, rarely involves the desire to act beneficially for others in the peer community (dimension 2), an appreciation of diversity in that community (dimension 3), the use of their writing skills to impact that community (dimension 4), or the need to be accountable for what they write to that community (dimension 5). But there is no reason why students’ academic writing experiences cannot do all of those things.

Teaching students to realize the virtues of the academic community, and the roles and responsibilities that participation in that community demands, can be made a more integral part of the undergraduate experience by using collaborative writing assignments in which the audience of the writing is the students themselves as representatives of the academic community. Of course, students still need to learn the rules of source citation. In fact, understanding the conventions of academic writing should be viewed as a critical tool for participating in the discourse of an academic community. Once this is understood, students can be encouraged, for example, to work in teams to discover a “collective vision” (Kezar & Carducci, 2009, p. 9) about a question or topic and to write about it in collectively authored documents for others in the campus community to read (for instance, students who are in the class, other peer groups). Posting their drafts online for others to see (and perhaps to elicit comment) or distributing printed copies to their peers can give students a sense of what it means to be accountable for—and take pride of ownership in—their work, a fundamental dimension in one’s concept of civic responsibility. Projects could involve documents beyond the typical research paper, including brochures, newsletters, fact sheets, blogs, and other non-traditional forms of academic writing. Working collaboratively to write something of any kind demands that participants negotiate and navigate multiple perspectives and ideas about knowledge and about how best to communicate information to their audiences.

Likewise, if students are assigned (or volunteer) to research certain aspects of a topic, they can be encouraged to interview each other as “topic experts” and then use those comments as direct quotes in their documents. This process, and the writing that results from it, accomplishes several things. First, students learn how research and quotes can help bolster a work’s credibility and accuracy. In addition, they grasp the importance of accurately quoting someone during the research process (and, perhaps, how it feels to be misquoted). They may take more care with their notetaking, as there is more pressure to “get it right.” Likewise, when the writing is posted or distributed to a wider audience, students
will quickly realize that their ideas and their words take on a kind of permanence in the community, unlike what they may have experienced from their prior academic writing, which is too often turned in and forgotten. Finally, students get the sense that what they write both within and to this community matters. Thus, students can reach Thornton and Jaeger’s (2006, 2007) fifth dimension, as they become truly accountable to their community for what they write, say, and do.

In a recent technical writing course for juniors and seniors, I had students model the dimensions of responsible citizenship for a unit focused on writing instructional manuals. The main assignment called for them to work in teams to produce a 10-page manual for incoming first-year students that would help them effectively navigate the many challenges involved with being a new student at our university. Earlier in the course, we had discussed the academic rules of quoting and source citation and how to avoid plagiarism. Thus, as we began this unit, students were moving through the first dimension, developing an understanding of the values related to source acknowledgment and the writing conventions of the academy. To begin, students worked collaboratively with their team members to decide what sections should be included in the team’s manual. This required them to consider (and remember) the many challenges and needs of a diverse body of first-year students and to focus on three or four main topics to explore. All teams were required to include an extended definition of the university neighborhood (which is considerably large) and at least one page of advice (a top-10 list, for example) on how to be a successful college student. Students incorporated text as well as graphics and photographs, and the final manual was submitted electronically as a pdf file.

Students came up with a remarkably wide variety of topics, including the best way to get laundry done on campus, what types of food could be found in cafeterias and nearby restaurants, how to find books and articles in the library, how to get involved in student groups and service projects, how to find the best professors, how to get along with roommates, what to do if you get sick, and how to use Googledocs to collaborate on group projects. Because the class of 20 included three international students, several of the teams also included information specifically tailored to the very challenging needs of new students from foreign countries. My students interviewed each other as content experts, because nearly all of them had been first-year students at the university, and now as upper-level students, they considered themselves experts on the topics about which they were writing.

Simply knowing that working well as a team would benefit everyone
on the team (that is, result in a higher grade) encouraged students to work through the second dimension of responsible citizenship (acting beneficially for others in the peer community). In addition, because they were writing for a specific community (first-year students), my students were forced to consider the different needs of this audience, which involved developing an appreciation of the diversity of this community (dimension 3). Finally, because they were writing something that would ultimately impact others, they were using skills in collaboration, research, and writing to benefit this community (dimension 4). Although due to time constraints I was not able to take this project to its final step and post or distribute their projects, this would certainly be ideal. Exposing their work to their audience (and inviting criticism and praise) would allow students to experience the ultimate dimension of responsible citizenship, in which they become truly accountable to others for their actions and their work.

In another course for a unit focused on research and digital sources, I had students work in teams to write and design web pages to describe in plain English some of the complex issues involved in topics such as copyright, fair use, cultural attitudes about plagiarism, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), and Creative Commons licensure. Teams selected one of these topics, and then spent time thoroughly researching it, becoming the class “content experts” on their topic. Rather than write a web page on what they learned, however, I had each team interview another team about a topic and then write a web page on this topic based on what they gathered from the interview. In other words, the team writing the “fair use” page interviewed the team that researched fair use; the team that wrote the “copyright” page may have researched SOPA, but they had to interview the team that researched copyright. Students were encouraged to quote each other directly and indirectly, and they had to use proper quoting punctuation and attribution. Students quickly saw that what they had learned during their research was important and that getting their quotations correct was critical. Some learned an important lesson about the consequences of misquoting someone. Not only did this project help students learn more about important subjects, but I believe it also taught them much about what it means to be accountable for the work they do. Likewise, I think my students began to feel like members of an academic community, building a respect for authorship and ownership of information and ideas. Thus, the product we ended up with (the informational web pages) was the result of a true community of learners.

Assignments such as these could be customized for virtually any discipline. Whenever students are collaborating, there is a potential for them to realize the value and challenges of civic participation. Encouraging
students to write about topics of importance to defined groups and write materials specifically for those groups can be an even more effective way for students to experience both the responsibilities and the rewards of participation in “a larger social fabric” (Ehrlich, 2000, p. xxvi) that is not driven exclusively by competitiveness, self-interest, or passivity. Experience of this kind will be of value not only during the college years but also after graduation, as students work to make a difference in their own civic communities.

**Students’ Benefits and Society’s Benefits**

As the price of higher education continues to rise, it is important to consider the benefits involved. For students, on average, “each year of education and each credential add measurably to an individual’s earnings” (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010, p. 10). Clearly, society also benefits from those graduates, who pay higher taxes on their earnings. Apart from the economic benefits, college-educated adults are more likely to volunteer, vote, and live healthier lifestyles, and their children are more likely to share those same characteristics (AAC&U, 2002; Baum et al., 2010,). Likewise, society’s return on the investment in a college education cannot be underestimated. The problems facing communities in the U.S. now and in the future will require educated, engaged citizens as well as empathetic participants who can “ensure enlightened policy decisions” (AAC&U, 2002). As Schneider (2000) suggested, “we must renew the public sphere, revitalize our associational life, and reinvest in those civic activities that are the nursery of citizenship and civic vitality” (p. 98). Thus, an important responsibility of higher education is to provide opportunities for students to learn about issues but also to prepare them to act on those issues in ethical and responsible ways.

Future research on the impact of collaborative work can help determine to what extent it can broaden students’ understanding of their responsibility to themselves and to their communities. Research could determine what types of collaborative work transfer best to civic engagement and whether collaboration impacts students equally across disciplines. Studies could help determine if collaborative writing deters students from plagiarizing or cheating in their other courses, and if it alters their feelings about the severity of these behaviors. This information would be of interest to those faculty and student affairs professionals who lament the decline in academic integrity and the correlation between students’ year in college and incidents of cheating. Likewise, much could be done to learn whether having collaborative experiences in college impacts students’ civic behav-
ior after they graduate.

Administrators, student affairs professionals, and faculty all have unique roles to play in building communities, fostering academic integrity, and modeling civic responsibility for students. Increasingly, curricular and co-curricular activities are being offered, such as learning communities, service-learning, volunteering, and student leadership programs, all of which can create opportunities for sustained collaboration and civic skill development. Considerable effort is also being spent managing the climate of the college culture, emphasizing through honor codes, pledges, and policies the importance of academic integrity and honesty on campus. As much as these messages are important to developing responsible, ethical citizens, they also run the risk of becoming merely symbolic if the messages of self-governance and trust are not also emphasized with equal persistence inside the classroom throughout an undergraduate’s college years. Despite all of the efforts to get students to play well with one another, the research is showing we need to do more. Declining levels of academic integrity and post-graduate civic engagement as well as the disturbing connection between cheating in school and dishonest behavior later in life suggest that these efforts need considerably more attention. Student collaboration of all kinds, but particularly collaborative writing—by students, for students—can provide a transformative learning experience about what it means to engage ethically in true community.

Footnote

¹Turnitin (http://turnitin.com) is an online plagiarism detection service owned by iParadigms.

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