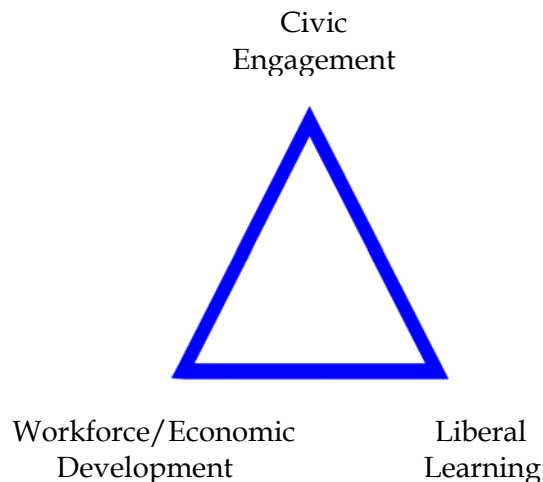




A vision for Minnesota higher education's collective identity

Historically, a clear, publicly understood, larger societal purpose for colleges and universities beyond workforce/economic development and liberal learning has led to generous public support. Since the end of the Cold War, higher education has not been able to successfully articulate a clear, collective purpose that captures the public's imagination. As a result -- according to higher education historians -- public support for higher education has declined consistently over the past fifteen years, with no end in sight. A new collective vision is needed that will address what amounts to an identity crisis in higher education. In the words of the late Ernest Boyer, this must be a vision that inspires others to see higher education more as "public good" than "private gain."

A vision for higher education's collective identity



"Civic engagement," with its great resonance for all types of institutions and its great uniting power, holds perhaps the greatest promise for addressing this identity crisis. Civic engagement, though expressed by different institutions in differing language, is a foundational tenet of every higher education institution. Beyond workforce/economic development and liberal learning, civic engagement is perhaps the most compelling, universally uniting force in higher education. Moreover, after 9/11, the public is more attuned to civic engagement and ethical development

than ever before. Campus civic engagement holds great promise for reinvigorating – in a sustained way - the spirit of democracy, while also yielding additional concrete benefits for students, communities and colleges and universities. As John Dewey says, “Democracy must be reborn in every generation, and education is its midwife.” >

Why Minnesota? Why now?

- **U of M President Bruininks, MnSCU Chancellor McCormick and Private College Council Director Laird** are eager to provide legislators and the public with a compelling common vision for higher education in Minnesota.
- **Trustees of the University of Minnesota and of MnSCU** have recently expressed increased interest in civic engagement.
- **The University of Minnesota’s Civic Engagement Task Force** is an unprecedented effort to reinvigorate the institution’s land grant mission and to establish civic engagement as the very platform upon which its teaching, research and service missions would rest.
- **Minnesota’s private colleges** continue to highlight civic engagement as a key historic and current strength.
- **The Governor, the State Senate and other policy makers and government officials** have expressed great enthusiasm for expanding the role of civic engagement in higher education.
- **Corporate, foundation, and nonprofit leaders** consistently express enthusiasm for reinvigorating the public purposes of higher education.
- **State and national higher education associations and disciplinary associations** are rapidly embracing civic engagement and service-learning as promising new strategies for achieving important outcomes for students, communities and college and universities.
- **Minnesota Campus Compact** is increasingly recognized as an important player in higher education and has strong connections with corporate, foundation, government and nonprofit leaders throughout Minnesota.
- **All 49 MCC member presidents** have signed the Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, more than any other state.
- **Parents and alumni** are expressing increasing interest in service-learning and civic engagement.
- **Faculty and student** engagement and interest in community work continues to rise at rapid rates.

- **The Minnesota Campus Civic Engagement Study**, which was commissioned by the state legislature and will be completed in early 2003, could provide a powerful platform upon which to publicly launch this new vision for higher education's collective identity. The final report will include profiles of exemplary civic engagement activities on 40 MCC campuses.