

## New Report Examines the Effects of College Student Participation in Civic and Community-Based Learning

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) today released [\*The Effects of Community-Based and Civic Engagement in Higher Education: What We Know and Questions that Remain\*](#). This new report synthesizes existing research on a range of widespread teaching and learning practices whose effects on college student outcomes have been extensively examined and documented. Several of these practices, known collectively as “high-impact practices,” or HIPs, engage students in community-based experiences intended to develop their civic capacities.

The report identifies positive outcomes across six broad areas:

- increased personal and social responsibility
- development of positive civic mindsets and dispositions
- improved graduation and retention rates
- learning gains (general)
- improved intellectual and practical skills
- increased career-related skills

Funded by a grant from Lumina Foundation, the report highlights empirical findings across studies that met a defined set of criteria for methodological scope and scale and therefore allow greater generalizability of findings. Though hundreds of studies exist with regard to outcomes related to community-based and civic engagement, relatively few studies (53) met the criteria for generalizability. Fewer still (11) specifically address findings for students from demographic groups historically underserved by higher education, and those that do are focused almost exclusively on retention and graduation rates.

“Despite the decades-long movement within higher education to develop students’ civic capacities through engagement in community-based experiences, polarization in the United States is worsening and the social fabric of democracy is weakening,” said AAC&U President Lynn Pasquerella. “If we’re to renew and reinvigorate our commitment to the civic and democratic purposes of higher education, we must begin by asking what we know—and don’t know—about our effectiveness in helping students develop the civic capacities needed to sustain our democracy. This new report does just that.”

“A healthy democracy depends on those it governs to be educated, engaged, and able to navigate new, unexpected challenges. The country needs colleges and universities to do this consistently and creatively, yet we have ruled our agendas with anecdotes and single-institution strategies,” said Terri Taylor, strategy director for innovation and discovery at Lumina Foundation. “This report provides essential insights into the national state of play and reveals a clearer path forward for broader and more equitable impact.”

The research synthesis was conducted by Jessica R. Chittum, director of assessment and pedagogical innovation; Kathryn A. E. Enke, secretary to the board and strategist for presidential

initiatives; and Ashley P. Finley, vice president for research and senior advisor to the president—all at AAC&U.

AAC&U is a founding and lead partner in the Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition. CLDE Coalition Partners will use this analysis in their ongoing work to promote equity and inclusion in college students' civic and democratic learning.

The full report is available for download [here](#).