

# The History and Future Development of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy

---

Professor Ira Harkavy, University of Pennsylvania

*Address to University Vice Chancellors and other Higher Educational Leaders  
Second International Inside Out Conference, Charting Uncertainty: Capital, Community and  
Citizenship, Ipswich Club, Ipswich Australia, July 3, 2003*

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak with you to discuss the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy. I would like to cover five topics during our time together:

- 1 Rationale for the Consortium
- 2 Formation and Development
- 3 Summary of findings from the Consortium's major study: Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility
- 4 Overall results of the Consortium's work to date.
- 5 Next steps

## **Rationale for the Consortium**

The rationale for the Consortium can be expressed by four propositions:

1. In spite of the increasing spread of democratic ideas and the increasing development of nominally democratic societies, a crisis exists in democratic development. Low and decreasing levels of participation in politics and in collaborative civic activities, a decline of confidence and trust in government as well as other major institutions, and a decrease in levels of student participation in school and university governance are indicators of the current crisis.
2. Education and the schooling system in general play central roles in determining the degree of democratic development of societies. The Council of Europe's Budapest Declaration for a Greater Europe without Dividing Lines, adopted on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council (May 1999), strongly emphasized the significance of the education system in democratic development. One of the three main sections of the Budapest Declaration, "Declaration and Program on Education for Democratic Citizenship, Based on the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens," highlighted the fundamental role of education in promoting active participation of all individuals in democratic life at all levels and the importance of "learning democracy in school and university life, including participation in decision-making and the associated structures of

pupils, students, and teachers.” It calls for “partnerships between educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and political authorities.” The document also calls on all 45 members “to make education for democratic citizenship based on all the rights and responsibilities of citizens, an essential component of all educational, training, cultural and youth policies and practices.”

3. The university is the key institution, within both the schooling system and the wider society, shaping democratic development. In July 1999, 51 college and university presidents in the United States signed a “President’s Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education.” By the end of 2002, 459 colleges had signed the Declaration, which highlights the university’s central role in educating citizens:

*Colleges and universities have long embraced a mission to educate students for citizenship. But now, with over two-thirds of recent high school graduates, and ever larger number of adults, enrolling in post secondary studies, higher education has an unprecedented opportunity to influence the democratic knowledge, dispositions, and habits of the heart that graduates carry with them into the public square.*

*Higher education is uniquely positioned to help Americans understand the histories and contours of our present challenges as a diverse democracy. It is uniquely positioned to help both students and our communities to explore new ways of fulfilling the promise of justice and dignity for all, both our own democracy and as a part of the global community.*

*...We believe that the challenge of the next millennium is the renewal of our own democratic life and reassertion of social stewardship. In celebrating the birth of democracy, we can think of no nobler task than committing ourselves to helping catalyze and lead a national movement to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of higher education. We believe that now and through the next century, our institutions must be vital agents and architects of a flourishing democracy. We urge all of higher education to join us.*

4. A global organization dedicated to higher education’s civic and democratic mission could make a significant contribution to advancing democratic citizenship in schools, universities, and societies throughout the world.

### **Formation and Development of the Consortium**

The International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy developed largely as the result of a joint recognition by higher educational leaders in Europe and the United States of similar concern about problems of long-term democratic development and the role universities could play in solving those problems. Specifically, the Consortium was formed as a vehicle for the development of a trans-Atlantic research project on Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility. The concept of sites of citizenship originated with the Council of Europe project on Education for Democratic

Citizenship. The project was launched in 1996 and adapted in the light of the Council of Europe Second Summit of Heads of State and Governments (1997).

As a follow-up to one of its preliminary contributions to the definition of the concept of citizenship, the Higher Education and Research Committee of the Council of Europe adopted, at its 6<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 16-18 March 1999, an outline project called “University as Site of Citizenship” and instructed its Bureau and its Secretariat to develop the project further. Academic organizations in the United States were similarly involved in a series of less ambitious projects concerning citizenship within higher educational institutions. To a significant extent, the International Consortium and its major project, Universities on Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility, reflect the concerns and policies for action expressed in the Budapest Declaration (1999) and the President’s Fourth of July Declaration (1999) mentioned earlier, as well as the Wingspread Declaration on Renewing The Civic Mission of the American Research University (1998). More specifically, in the summer of 1999, the Committee on Higher Education and Research of the Council of Europe initiated a dialogue with a loose consortium of associations of higher education in the U.S.

Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility was launched as a concept in the summer of 1999 and began its research under the auspices of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, with the participation of the Council of Europe’s Committee on Higher Education and Research and a United States Consortium comprised of four leading higher education associations: American Association for Higher Education, American Association of Colleges and Universities, American Council on Education, and Campus Compact. After trans-Atlantic consultation at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in December, 1999 a pilot research program was started in the spring of 2000 to study higher education’s impact on democracy on campus and in the community and the wider society. The pilot study involved mapping the state of democratic education at 15 universities in Europe and 15 universities in the United States. Research teams from each of the 30 universities were assembled and a common protocol was developed through meetings and consultations involving teams from all the participating sites. The final European and U.S. reports, which summarized and analyzed the university case study reports, were submitted to the Council of Europe’s Committee on Higher Education and Research. They are available on the Consortium’s website: (<http://iche.sas.upenn.edu>) and are being edited for publication.

The pilot project received support for its European research from the Council of Europe and funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation for international collaboration and U.S. research. The University of Pennsylvania supported the project's administrative operation and became the organizational center for both the project and the International Consortium. Frank Plantan, Co-Director of International Relations at Penn, was named Executive Secretary of both the International Consortium and General Rapporteur of the Universities as Sites Project. Mr. Plantan is the first non-European to be named a Rapporteur of a Council of Europe-sponsored project.

In the fall of 2000, South Africa joined the Consortium through the Community, Higher Education, Service Partnership (CHESP) of the Joint Education Trust and the Republic of Korea also joined the Consortium through its Ministry of Education. Universities in South Africa and Korea have also conducted studies as part of the pilot project.

### **Findings**

The European study's findings include the following:

1. A perceived decline or crisis in student participation existed at all sites except Queens University, Belfast.
2. Most University administrators and many faculty viewed education for democracy to be entirely a personal matter outside their area of responsibility.
3. Most faculty and administrators considered education for democracy and democratic citizenship a distraction from the university's primary educational mission.
4. Faculty contested the idea that universities should stimulate democratic behavior.
5. "Persuasive passivity" characterized student participation in university governance.
6. The organizational structure of university governance and pedagogy significantly affected the development of democratic behavior.

The U.S. study's findings include the following:

1. Universities can and should be agents of social transformation.
2. Universities do not function as democratic organizations.
3. Even in universities with relatively high levels of democratic procedures and governance mechanisms that encourage participation, there are high levels of cynicism among both students and faculty about the actual extent of democratic decision-making and the extent of student and faculty influence.
4. University decision-making is believed to be in hands of a small elite.

5. Many sites view service-learning initiatives as the primary means providing education for democracy. Sites involved with service learning seem to have a greater number of collateral programs working with their community.
6. Leadership is crucial to institutional engagement. The president tends to play a central role in advancing civic engagement and university outreach efforts with the community.

## **Results**

These major results have been produced since spring 1999:

1. Created and launched a global organization to advance higher education's mission to contribute democratic development.
2. Launched and completed a research project, involving 30 higher educational institutions across Europe and the United States.
3. Expanded the Consortium and Universities as Sites Project beyond Europe and the United States to South Africa and Korea, with strong interest expressed by Australia, Philippines, Mexico, as well as other countries
4. Developed and implemented an innovative approach to research in which scholars from universities in different countries across the world work on the same research problem in the locality in which their university is located. The approach is adaptable to a range of issues such as universities and community health, universities and community arts and culture, universities and schooling, etc. The approach allows for genuinely collaborative and cooperative research, involving scholars with deep knowledge of their local setting, thereby overcoming the problem of outside experts "parachuting" into setting with little tacit and nuanced knowledge derived from close experience.
5. Formation of a group of scholars from across Europe, U.S., Korea, South Africa, and Australia who are in frequent communication and interaction over the internet and at international meetings.
6. Presentation of the work of the Consortium and the results of the Universities as Sites project at meetings of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (2000), American Political Science Association (2001), American Association for Higher Education (2002), International Society for Third Sector Research (2002), and international conferences at the University of Pennsylvania (2001 and 2003) and at the University of Queensland (2001 and 2003). Nearly all of these presentations involved a panel of researchers from a number of countries (e.g., U.S., Poland,

England, Italy, Northern Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Korea, Germany). Articles about the Consortium and the Universities as Sites have been published in the Political Psychologist, Council of Europe proceedings, The Presidency, among other journals.

### **Next Steps**

1. Expand the Consortium to include new sites from across the world.
2. Begin phase 2 of the Universities at Sites Project, which will involve approximately 320 university partners from U.S., Europe, Australia, South Africa, Korea, etc.
3. Expand Consortium's research projects to include undergraduate and graduate research seminars on the impact of a college education on democratic development. Students at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, will be participating in a Faculty-Student Collaborative Seminar in Citizenship and Democratic Development of Penn Undergraduates. Similar seminars will be offered at other universities in the United States and Europe that focus on citizenship and democratic development of students attending those universities.
4. Expand Consortium projects to include a university-assisted community school adaptation project, which will work to establish schools as centers of education, service, participation, engagement, and activity for students, their parents and other community members. Students at both the school and university will learn by solving significant school and community problems. Students from pre-school through graduate school, in effect, will learn by real-world community problem solving.
5. Develop a global forum on the Consortium's web site on best practices for higher education to advance democratic education and development.
6. Convene local, national, and global discussions and conferences on developing effective policies to increase the contribution of higher education to democracy.
7. Publish and widely distribute a monograph on Universities and Democratic Development: An Analysis of Findings with Proposals for Action from Europe, United States, South Africa, Korea and Australia.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to meet with such a distinguished group of Australian higher educational leaders. I look forward to working with you and learning from your in the future.

