



THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY ACTION STATEMENT OF PRESIDENTS AND CHANCELLORS

In the mid-1980s, a group of higher education leaders came together based on a shared concern about the future of American democracy. Motivated by their conviction that amidst the pressures toward personal acquisition and personal advancement, their students were not learning to think, speak, and act in the service of the public good, they resolved that higher education must reclaim its historic mission of preparing the next generation of citizens to achieve public goals and solve public problems.

This group—a handful at first, and more than one hundred within a year—decided to take action. They became the founders of Campus Compact. Their chosen language—a compact—signified a commitment to each other to work together to advance the public purposes of higher education on their campuses, in their communities, and across the country. It also signified a commitment to honor the longstanding compact between higher education and the public.

That initial commitment catalyzed a movement that has changed the landscape of higher education. Nearly 1100 institutions now belong to Campus Compact, which has grown to include a network of state and regional Compacts and has become a key element of a global movement for the public purposes of higher education. Campus Compact helped build a national network of engaged faculty and staff and a vast trove of research-based and experiential knowledge about how to educate students for democracy and build community partnerships for positive change. Because of the work undertaken through Campus Compact and a growing group of allies, what was once a novel and marginal idea—that college students should engage in sustained community-based experiences to develop their capacities as local and global citizens—is now in the mainstream of higher education.

In an effort to build from student engagement to deeper institutional change and community impact, Campus Compact in 1999 promulgated the Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, a statement calling for renewed action to magnify the impact of campus engagement. Evidence of the power of the Presidents' Declaration abounds: the emergence of civic engagement centers whose leaders have claimed a voice in higher education; the centrality of community engagement in campus strategic plans; countless innovative partnerships producing positive educational, health, environmental, and economic outcomes for communities; and the creation of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, the first mechanism for certifying an institution's substantive commitment to engagement.

These successes warrant celebration. They represent advancement of the public ends that are the very reason colleges and universities are brought into existence. Nonetheless, even as colleges and universities have deepened our commitment to the public and democratic ideals at the heart of Campus Compact, the challenges around us have grown. We have seen a decline in the culture and practice of democracy, as evidenced by the polarization of our political discourse and institutions. And we have witnessed a rapid increase in economic inequality, exacerbating America's persistent racial divide and eroding the capacity of higher education to play its historic role of enabling social mobility.

We therefore face a choice: We can conclude that the challenges are too great and scale back our ambitions for the public and democratic value of higher education, or we can redouble our efforts with a renewed commitment to preparing students for democratic citizenship, building partnerships for change, and reinvigorating higher education for the public good.

Recognizing the special responsibilities of presidents and chancellors in a democracy, we choose the latter course. We choose to articulate the public purposes of the institutions we lead. We choose to deepen the work of our campuses by ensuring that our teaching, research, and institutional actions contribute to the public good. And we choose to work together to accelerate the pace of change commensurate with the local, national, and global challenges we face. For while we compete for students, for funding, and for victories on the athletic field, when we act in the civic realm we act in concert, speaking with one voice to make the case for the contribution of higher education to the public good.

To advance the public purposes of higher education, we affirm the following statements, which characterize our current commitments and name the ideals toward which we will work with renewed dedication, focus, and vigor.

We empower our students, faculty, staff, and community partners to co-create mutually respectful partnerships in pursuit of a just, equitable, and sustainable future for communities beyond the campus—nearby and around the world.

We prepare our students for lives of engaged citizenship, with the motivation and capacity to deliberate, act, and lead in pursuit of the public good.

We embrace our responsibilities as place based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically.

We harness the capacity of our institutions—through research, teaching, partnerships, and institutional practice—to challenge the prevailing social and economic inequalities that threaten our democratic future.

We foster an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.

These are commitments we make to each other with a recognition that our goals for a thriving and sustainable democracy cannot be achieved if we act alone—and that they cannot be denied if we act together. Our success over the last thirty years gives us confidence that we can build a world in which all students are prepared for lives of engaged citizenship, all campuses are engaged in strong partnerships advancing community goals, and all of higher education is recognized as an essential building block of a just, equitable, and sustainable future.

In affirming these statements, each of us makes a commitment to develop a Campus Civic Action Plan within one year after March 20, 2016, or the date thereafter on which we become signatories. Our Civic Action Plans will state the actions our campuses will take as we move forward with a renewed sense of urgency, along with the impacts we expect to achieve. Our Civic Action Plans will be shared publicly, as will our assessments of the progress we are making in achieving the goals stated in the Plans.