

# The American Democracy Project: A Civic Engagement Initiative

## Newsletter

Administrative Newsletter # 1

22 April 2003

SUBJECT: Welcome

TO: Chief Academic Officers, Institutions Participating in the American Democracy Project

FROM: George L. Mehaffy, Vice President  
American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)

Welcome to the American Democracy Project! For more than a year now, a group of chief academic officers, and colleagues such as Felice Nudelman at The New York Times, have been meeting to develop this project concept. Now we are ready to begin our work. I think this project holds great promise for students, for our institutions, and indeed for our country.

I know most of you have read the project description, but in a sentence or two, here is what we're about:

The American Democracy Project seeks to engage the higher education community - administrators, faculty and students - in a set of conversations and activities about civic engagement. The project will provide opportunities for students to understand and participate in activities designed to increase their commitment to civic engagement. The goal of the project is to contribute to the development of an informed and contributing citizenry for the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (I will enclose a copy of the latest draft at the end of this email, for those of you who want to see our detailed thinking on the subject...very much a work in progress; one that I hope all of you will contribute to in the months ahead).

I'm very pleased that you will be participating in this initiative. We have 132 institutions, representing 1,257,179 students, across 42 states, involved in this project. I think we're going to have a great time together in this 3-year project.

The first year of the project (Fall 2003-Spring 2004) focuses on the campus and national conversation. I will provide more detail about the national conversation in subsequent emails. I will be communicating with you from time to time about the project, providing materials and ideas, responding to questions, highlighting examples of great practice, and serving as the coordinating agent for the project.

Because each of you is incredibly busy, I will be sending small, bite-sized pieces that are quickly comprehensible, instead of long, complex documents and recommendations. Some of the newsletters will be administrative in nature (like this one), **which often require action**, while

others will be conceptual or programmatic. Many of the programmatic newsletters will be taken from longer documents. I will maintain a complete file of all messages, by number and date, separated into administrative and conceptual categories on the AASCU website, so that you can find old messages, review previous materials, or download critical information.

Today, to take care of administrative issues, I have 3 requests for you.

1. While the primary audience for this project is chief academic officers, I suspect most of you will also want to designate another person on campus as a project coordinator. If so, please ask them to provide all of their contact information on the form attached to this email. I will plan to send most communications to both you and the campus coordinator, so that each campus always has a backup in the case of communications failures, or at times when you are off campus.
2. The core text for this project will be a new book published recently by the Carnegie Foundation. Please plan to read that book before our meeting in Utah. If you don't already have at least one copy of the book (you may want to order copies for other key individuals on campus), here are the ordering details.

Educating Citizens : Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility. Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont, and Jason Stephens. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2003. The price of the book, if ordered from Jossey-Bass, is \$ 28.00 (a new copy in Amazon was listed for \$ 23.24) You can also order the book from Amanda Yu, Administrative Assistant, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 650-566-5128 [yu@carnegiefoundation.org](mailto:yu@carnegiefoundation.org) [<mailto:yu@carnegiefoundation.org>](mailto:yu@carnegiefoundation.org). She has about 50 copies left, and offers a 40% discount, which is \$ 16.80 plus shipping, plus state tax for California residents.

3. Finally, please register for the AASCU Academic Affairs Summer Meeting in Snowbird, Utah. That is the time that we have devoted to assisting you to be brilliant in your work with faculty and others on your campus. In particular, we will be focusing on the concept of the campus conversation, and how to lead that conversation. We will look at the content of civic engagement, and then address how you can initiate and sustain that conversation on your campus for the coming academic year. Tom Ehrlich will be working with us for two days as we plan the first year's activities and events. Please remember to register both with AASCU and with the hotel. Details on the meeting and the registration information can be found at the AASCU website [www.aascu.org](http://www.aascu.org)  [<http://www.aascu.org>](http://www.aascu.org) under meetings or directly at  [<http://www.aascu.org/meetings/aa\\_summer03/default.htm>](http://www.aascu.org/meetings/aa_summer03/default.htm)

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if you have questions or I can be of assistance.

Thank you again for your participation in this project.

George L. Mehaffy