

Macalester Civic Forum

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Spring 2007*

Article 5

5-4-2009

Editor's Note

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Recommended Citation

(2007) "Editor's Note," *Macalester Civic Forum*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 5.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/maccivicf/vol1/iss1/5>

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The kind of liberal arts education offered by Macalester College today is the product of an academic tradition that can trace its genealogy back to Classical Antiquity and the ancient tradition of *studia liberalia*. As advocated by Socrates, Cicero, Seneca, and others, this tradition has two defining currents or moments. The first emphasizes an education that promotes the “examined life” — that is, an education that encourages students to take charge of their own thought and liberate themselves from ignorance and uncritical convention. This is the moment of the *vita contemplative*, the life of philosophical reflection and meaning-making. The second moment emphasizes an education that prepares students for participation and leadership in the public life of the community (as Seneca reminds us, not just the local community but a multi-civilizational global community as well). This is the moment of the *vita activa*: active participation in the public life of both the local *polis* and the universal moral community of humanity. This academic tradition, of course, is not peculiar to Western or European history. Similar philosophies and practices can be found in cultures/civilizations as diverse as the India of Das Guptas, Confucian China, the Classical Islamic world, and the West African cities of Jene’ and Timbuktu. But given that Macalester was founded against the backdrop of the Western tradition of liberal learning, it is helpful to locate the roots of our core educational mission in the soil of ancient Greek and Roman thought.

This tradition of liberal learning was transplanted to the United States in the early colonial period and flourished in this new social context. From the very beginning, the new and distinctively American liberal arts colleges sought to provide an educational experience that prepared students for the condition of freedom. To be certain, many of these colleges were originally founded to train privileged white males to assume leadership roles in an essentially theocratic society. For this elite cohort, however, the education they received was intended not only to impart knowledge and develop the intellect (*vita contemplativa*), but also to cultivate the character and sense of civic duty, espoused by Cicero, necessary to lead lives of active citizenship and effective leadership (*vita activa*). In this respect, the liberal arts college has always been the institutional expression of a distinctively American version of the ancient tradition of *studia liberalia*.

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Macalester's liberal arts vision and mission clearly embody the uniquely American conception of the classical liberal arts tradition, but with its own distinctive emphases. As both Edward Neill and James Wallace, the most significant of the College's founders and builders, taught and lived, ours has been an education with a dual intention: on the one hand, to encourage students to cultivate their humanity through disciplined academic study and critical self-reflection (*vita contemplativa*); on the other, to offer an education intended to prepare students for the condition of freedom and the vocation of leadership (*vita activa*). Under the leadership of both President James Wallace and President Charles Turck, the College distinguished its educational program by purposefully focusing on preparation for public life and leadership, not only within American society but also within the global community. This is clearly reflected in the College's mission statement, which reads as follows:

Macalester is committed to being a preeminent liberal arts college with an educational program known for its high standards for scholarship and its special emphasis on internationalism, multiculturalism and service to society.

The Macalester of today, then, is known for a particular type of education—one that embodies our own unique synthesis of critical self-reflection *and* preparation for active involvement in civic life.

As Macalester looks to the future, there are many reasons to conserve both the distinctive liberal arts tradition that has long distinguished the College and the deeper traditions of liberal learning out of which our particular mission emerged. Three reasons are particularly compelling. First, these academic traditions have always served our students well. Macalester students continue to benefit from an education that combines Socrates' focus on the "examined life," Cicero's notion of "civic duty," and Seneca's recognition of the importance of what we would call "internationalism" and "multiculturalism." Second, these traditions embody values that the Macalester community is deeply passionate about. The values articulated in the College's *Mission Statement* and *Statement of Purpose and Belief* resonate powerfully with students, alumni, staff, and faculty alike. Finally, elements of Macalester's distinctive version of the liberal arts tradition distinguish the College in important ways. Our commitment to internationalism and community

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service, in particular, are so deeply rooted that they continue to set Macalester apart from other preeminent liberal arts colleges.

A tradition, no matter how rich and enduring, cannot afford to stand still, however, for the ceaseless irruption of new historical conditions and challenges will always threaten to render those traditions obsolete, irrelevant, or worse. The task before us, then, is to specify the challenges facing the College today and to renew our distinctive version of the *studia liberalia* and ensure that the liberal education we offer is relevant to our students as they enter and engage the world of the early 21st century. In this respect, there is broad agreement that ours is no ordinary epoch.

One of the steps that Macalester has taken to respond to this set of challenges is to create a new Institute for Global Citizenship with the following mission:

To encourage, promote and support learning that prepares students for lives as effective and ethical “global citizen-leaders”; scholarship that enriches the public and academic discourse on important questions of global significance; and service that enhances learning and/or scholarship while enriching the community.

Since its inception, the Institute has attempted to integrate a number of previously disparate educational activities and initiatives related to internationalism, multiculturalism, experiential learning, and civic engagement around the theme of “educating global citizen-leaders.” Although only a couple of years old, we believe that the creation of the Institute has already had at least two benefits. First, we contend that it has helped us renew our tradition of preparing students for lives of civic participation by a judicious updating in light of contemporary conditions. It is clear that an ethic of civic responsibility/duty, engagement, and leadership must apply to all moments of our lives. Moreover, what is needed now is an approach to “citizenship” that embraces and integrates the local, national, and transnational dimensions of civic life and leadership. Second, we believe that creating the Institute has helped reinforce our existing hard-won reputation for innovation and leadership in the fields of internationalism, multiculturalism, and community service/civic engagement. We believe that it will, in due course,

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strengthen our overall reputation for providing a liberal education that is both academically excellent *and* distinctive.

Among the new programs is the Civic Forum, an annual conference intended to provide the Macalester community with an opportunity to explore the “big” normative issues related to civic life, leadership, and engagement in early 21st-century America. Typically, the Forum will comprise three elements: (1) a keynote address delivered by a noted scholar or public intellectual; (2) a series of commissioned student papers, with responses from Macalester faculty; and (3) a series of student-organized events related to the themes of the Forum. While in future years the Forum will feature student scholarship focused on the profound concerns that affect civic life and leadership within the United States, in this initial instantiation it focused on the logically prior—even foundational—questions: (a) how should we conceptualize “global citizenship” and (b) what are the key issues pertaining to the theory and practice of global citizenship in the contemporary era? In order to help us address these questions, we asked the College’s President, Provost, Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Dean of the Institute for Global Citizenship, and the Chaplain to share their views on the theme. We also invited distinguished scholars to address specific issues related to global citizenship on each of its three spatial scales: local, national, and transnational. Macalester students then presented their own interventions. Our expectation was that this event would signal the kind of seriousness of intellectual purpose necessary if the College is to sustain and sharpen its efforts to educate students more purposefully for ethical and effective engagement and leadership in the communities in which they live. Given the quality of the essays assembled in this volume, we believe that this expectation has been met. We hope that you find them as insightful and interesting as did the faculty, staff, and students who heard them when first presented at the College in early 2007.