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## Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility

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# Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility

Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont, & Jason Stephens;  
(San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

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*Reviewed by Pedro Villarreal III*

*Educating Citizens* addresses important questions about moral and civic development in higher education. According to Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens (Colby, et al.), moral and civic education represents a task, duty, or responsibility, if not a chore, higher education institutions and their leaders cannot afford to ignore. The authors' thesis is that higher education remains one of several phases in the lives of many people and this phase serves as a potentially pivotal point in time for the development or re-development of beliefs, values, and understandings. In essence, moral and civic education occurs more notably during this phase of life. Thus, institutions of higher education need to commit institutional resources in innovative ways to develop moral and civic education. Furthermore, Colby, et al. contend, as a requisite for effective development, moral or civic education needs to occur within the context of both the curricular and co-curricular dimensions of higher education.

The first portion of the book is dedicated to defining moral and civic education and explicating the relevance of each to the other. In it, the authors argue that the two are inextricably attached. The two represent themes that are so enmeshed that understanding what each represents without having an understanding of the other is difficult, if not impossible. The authors define moral and civic education as educating "for substantive values, ideals, and standards, at least in broad terms" (p. 11). Furthermore, Colby et al. state that moral and civic education should not be solely concerned with what is known as *values clarification*. The authors, more importantly, give reasons for the involvement of higher education in moral and civic education. First, they emphatically state, "[I]t is not possible to create a value-neutral environment, so it is preferable for colleges and universities to examine the values they stand for and make conscious and deliberate choices about what they convey to students" (p. 11). The authors' second more important reason is their conviction that there exists "some basic moral principals, ideals, and virtues that can form a common ground to guide institutions of higher education in their work, including the work of educating citizens in a democracy" (p. 11).

Colby, et al., proceed to describe the values possessed by each of the twelve quite unique institutions of higher education they studied. They also describe the ways in which these institutions attempt to teach undergraduate moral and civic development

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through the use of creativity, commitment, perseverance, institutional structures, and institutional climates supportive of this type of engagement. In addition, they shed light into the pedagogical and institutional factors that provide for a more open culture which better allows for moral and civic education. The authors allude to the historical reasons for higher education's disengagement with moral and civic education. They suggest liberal education fell prey to more specialized and flexible curricular offerings in higher education. Consequently, specialization and distributive curricular offerings diminished attempts by colleges to educate students for civic and moral lives. Interestingly, the authors appeared to omit a body of literature regarding aspects of the secularization process in higher education as well as the philosophical shifts of thought (pre-enlightenment to enlightenment) that potentially had more of an effect on the removal of civic and moral education from higher education than those suggested in the book.

The research methodology employed for the study appeared to be appropriate to the researchers' goals of understanding whether higher education offers and under what context moral and civic education continues to be offered today. Qualitative interviews were conducted at the selected institutions. The institutions were selected because they represented a variety of types and models of institutions such as two- and four-year; religiously affiliated and secular; military and non-military; research and liberal arts; urban, suburban, and rural; and large, small, and medium in size. Although the authors acknowledge the institutions vary significantly, Colby, et al., write these institutions are not very different with respect to their visions of moral growth. The institutions studied have different historical and philosophical understandings of the world. To suggest that the current slate of religious and secular institutions have the same intentional goals is somewhat naïve.

The findings of their research provide a picture for institutional programs and curricula developed for civic and moral education. The authors claim that three themes emerged during the course of their research on how institutions attempt to provide civic and moral education to undergraduate students. Moral and civic virtue, community connections, and systematic social responsibility are the three themes that emerged. The moral and civic virtue theme encompasses an institution's set of core values or virtues to be shared with students such as intellectual integrity, concern

for truth, mutual respect and tolerance, open-mindedness, concern for individual or community rights and welfare, and a commitment to rational discourse and procedural fairness. The community connections theme is evidenced in the institution's desire to develop in students a sense of belonging to the broader community and participate in that community in meaningful ways. The last theme discussed is systematic social responsibility which entails the institution's desire to give students an appreciation, understanding, and working ethic as it relates to the greater social justice issues in the world. Ultimately, the authors suggest that institutions must be involved in offering all three for a comprehensive and distinctive approach to moral and civic education.

Overall, the authors have initiated an important conversation about the relevance of moral and civic education. For the student development specialist, the book provides insightful examples of institutional attempts to form the moral and civic development of their students. The differing models presented can be replicated by Christian institutions and their leaders. In essence, the book can serve as an excellent reference. Colby, et al. also illuminated the importance for cooperative efforts between co-curricular administrators and faculty (curricular) members in the civic and moral development of students. For those individuals who are more interested in the theoretical aspects of moral and civic development, this book is *sine qua non*, the only book on the topic that develops the theoretical assumptions of moral and civic development of students in colleges and universities.