Tackling Wicked Problems from Campus: The Critical Role of University Centers, Faculty, and Students as Key Local Resources for Deliberative Engagement

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Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved public communication and community problem solving

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CPD Projects, 2006-2018

- Civic mission of schools
- Grade configuration of Poudre School District schools
- Statewide dropout rate
- Colorado Health Care Reform
- Student housing
- Improving higher education
- Childhood obesity
- Bicycle safety
- Diversity Dialogues at CSU Diversity Conference
- STEM education in K-12
- Arts Engagement Summit
- UniverCity Connections (CSU/Old Town collaborative project)
- School budgeting issues/school closures
- Medical Marijuana
- Regional visioning process
- Water and growth issues
- Poverty in Larimer County
- PSD Student Think Tank facilitator group
- K-12 school improvement
- Improving higher education through student-faculty reciprocity
- Politics of food
- Issues surrounding aging
- Early childhood education
- On campus stadium proposal
- Senior transportation
- Campus smoking
- School safety
- Bullying
- Mental health
- Nature in the City
- Larimer County Landfill/Wasteshed
- Diversity and Inclusion in Fort Collins
- CSU Innovation and Economic Prosperity
- CSU parking and affordable housing
Overview: Three Key Arguments

#1 – The Basic Reality
Most of the key problems we face are best understood through a wicked problems lens.

#2 – The Bad News
Human nature and many of our primary institutions and processes are woefully ill-suited to address wicked problems.

#3 – The Hopeful News
Once we realize #1 and #2, we can build capacity for the kinds of conversations, processes, and institutions that cultivate the wisdom so critical to addressing wicked problems. Colleges & universities have a critical role to play at the local level.
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Wicked problems inherently involve competing underlying values, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that cannot be resolved by science.
Water in Northern Colorado as a Wicked Problem

Some things we care about:

- Healthy river with healthy ecosystems
- Recreational opportunities
- Economic vitality
- Water for homes & lawns
- Open space and wildlife habitat
- Low cost of living
- Water for local farms
- Local food economy
- Freedom of choice of where to live
WE WANT OUR FOOD TO BE:

- Inexpensive
- Fresh
- Nutritious
- Safe
- Long lasting
- Delicious
- Convenient (Accessible, Easy to prepare)
- Ethically grown (labor/animal welfare)
- Supportive of a local economy
- Supportive of a agriculture community
- Grown and delivered in a environmentally responsible manner
- Supportive of efforts to reduce hunger locally and globally

FOOD AS A WICKED PROBLEM

Our choice
HEALTH CARE AS A WICKED PROBLEM

High Quality

Accessible

Low cost
Competing Values in Downtown Fort Collins

- Aesthetics/Beauty
- Compassion
- Diversity/Inclusivity
- Economic health/vitality
- Effective use of public resources
- Equality
- Excitement/fun
- Family
- Individual freedom
- Individual responsibility
- Individual rights
- Justice/Fairness
- Public health/environment
- Respect for law
- Respect for others
- Safety
Parking at CSU as a Wicked Problem
Some things we care about:

- Low cost
- Fairness
- Safety
- Work productivity
- Flexibility
- Aesthetics/Campus beauty
- Convenience/Low time cost
- Low community impact/Good neighbors
- Employee morale
- Environment
- Consistency/Ease of use

- Works for staff
- Works for faculty
- Works for visitors
- Works for students
- Works for working parents
- Works for commuters
Capitalism or Sustainability as a Wicked Problem

• The “Triple Bottom Line” of
  – Profit (economics, also tied to jobs and taxes)
  – People (social justice, equality, fairness)
  – Planet (environment)
We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.
We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Preamble</th>
<th>Current Phrasing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic Tranquility/ Common defense</td>
<td>Security/Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Welfare</td>
<td>Equality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberty to ourselves</td>
<td>Freedom (for us)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberty for our posterity</td>
<td>Freedom (for future generations)</td>
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Which is **most** important to you? (choose only one)

1. Justice
2. Security/safety
3. Equality
4. Freedom (for us)
5. Freedom (future generations)

Results from Denver Leadership Foundation Workshop, Summer 2017
Which is **least** important to you? (choose only one)

1. Justice
2. Security/safety
3. Equality
4. Freedom (for us)
5. Freedom (future generations)

Results from Denver Leadership Foundation Workshop, Summer 2017
Inherent Democratic Tensions

- Freedom and Equality (and between equality and equity)
- Our Freedom and Freedom of Future generations
- Freedom and Security
- Justice is a tension within itself (justice as the ideal between too much and too little credit or punishment)

Some others

- Short term and long term
- Individual rights and community good
- Unity and diversity
- Cooperation and competition
- Structure and agency (or opportunity and individual responsibility)
- Flexibility/Innovation and Consistency/Tradition
- Best use of resources (money, time, people)
Wicked problems inherently involve competing underlying values, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that cannot be resolved by science. They call for ongoing high quality communication, creativity, and broad collaborative action to manage well.
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What Are We Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative
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We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views
What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

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How we interpret new evidence

“when we want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Can I believe it?’ Then…we search for supporting evidence, and if we find even a single piece of pseudo-evidence, we can stop thinking…. In contrast, when we don’t want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Must I believe it?’ Then we search for contrary evidence, and if we find a single reason to doubt the claim, we can dismiss it“

• Jonathan Haidt and Tom Gilovich
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Bush: 'Too often we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions'
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What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Problematic

- We crave certainty and consistency
- We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative
- We strongly prefer to gather with the like minded
- We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views
- We avoid values dilemmas, tensions, and tough choices
Overview: Three Key Arguments

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The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

1. Impact of the internet
2. Negative interaction effects
3. Individually developed subconscious biases
4. Media focus on conflict
5. Overly adversarial political system
6. The Russell effect

The cycle begins with the impact of the internet, leading to negative interaction effects, then to individually developed subconscious biases, followed by media focus on conflict, and finally to an overly adversarial political system.
Why Experts Can’t Save Us
(though they can certainly help when used well)

- Good data is undermined in a polarized environment
- Facts don’t change minds or behavior
- Experts by definition are focused on a specific, narrow aspect of the problem (i.e. they struggle with wicked problems).
- Experts often focus on being “value free” (they tell us what is or what could be, not what should be)
- Expert perspectives can overemphasize what can be measured and underemphasize what cannot
- Expert dominated processes shut out the public
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Key Steps for Local Communities

• Adopting a wicked problems mindset
The Wicked Problems Mindset

- Presume wicked problems, not wicked people
- Become more comfortable with uncertainty
- Focus on elevating the conversation not just winning the argument
- Put your energy toward identifying, engaging, and negotiating inherent tensions
- Work toward creating a learning community
Key Steps for Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset
- Better processes - tap into different aspects of human nature
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What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community
We are inherently empathetic
We are inherently pragmatic and creative
We can overcome our bad tendencies and build better habits
Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases and tackle wicked problems well is **genuine conversation with people they respect.**
Key Steps for Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset
- Better processes - tap into different aspects of human nature
- Build local capacity for deliberative engagement
What is Deliberative Engagement?

- Deliberative democracy
- Community problem-solving
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Participatory decision-making
  - Slow democracy
  - Strong democracy
- Multi-stakeholder dispute resolution
  - Public participation
  - Democratic governance
  - Collaborative governance
- Organic or community politics
  - Consensus building or seeking processes
  - Organic politics
Forms of Interactive Communication

DELIBERATION
Purpose is to make tough decisions together by working through tensions

DEBATE
Purpose is to test the quality of arguments and positions through the clash of ideas and expertise

DIALOGUE
Purpose is to foster understanding and respect through listening, storytelling, and conversation
Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

• Overall deliberative framing
  – Wicked problem, multiple approaches, broad range of actors, starting discussion “upstream” (before polarization)

• Discussion guides/backgrounder
  – Base of information, something to react to, framed for deliberation, not persuasion

• Small, diverse, representative groups

• Processes designed for interaction and learning

• Deliberative facilitators
The Four Key Shifts of Deliberative Engagement

• From wicked people → to wicked problems
• From adversaries → to collaborators
• From inciting the worst of human nature → to bringing out the best of human nature
• From facts as cherry picked ammunition or “fake news” → to facts as tools for addressing problems together
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

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The cycle begins with media focus on conflict, leading to an overly adversarial political system. This system then has a negative impact on the internet, which then exacerbates subconscious biases. These biases lead to negative interaction effects, which further fuel the cycle.
The Virtuous Cycle of Authentic Engagement

Opportunity for authentic engagement (primary at local level)

Development of mutual understanding

Building of trust and respect

Greater refinement of opinions (i.e. learning)

Potential for collaboration and co-creation
Passionate impartiality
The recognition of the tensions between:

- Honoring equality & inclusion
- Honoring sound data & strong arguments
- Democracy!
- Expertise!
Key Steps for Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset
- Better processes - tap into different aspects of human nature
- Build local capacity for deliberative engagement
- Reinvigorate or create new key bridging institutions
Institutional Troubles
Bridging v. Polarizing Institutions

More polarizing

• Political parties/elections
• Advocacy groups
• Internet / Social media

More bridging

• Media/Press
• Experts
• School districts
• Universities

• Community organizations like Leadership Foundations, League of Women Voters, United Way, Community Foundations, Leadership programs, Boards and Commissions
Key Steps for Local Communities

• Adopting a wicked problems mindset
• Better processes - tap into different aspects of human nature
• Build local capacity for deliberative engagement
• Reinvigorate or create new key bridging institutions
• Cultivate citizens as wise collaborators
Brennan’s *Against Democracy*

Three types of citizens:
- Hobbits
- Hooligans
- Wise collaborators
When Universities Focus on Local Deliberative Capacity: The “Win-Win-Win-Win-Win-Win”

• Students
• Faculty
• University
• Community

Carcasson, “The Critical Role of Local Centers and Institutes in Advancing Deliberative Democracy,” 2014
Imagining the Deliberative University

- Adopts the wicked problem mindset
- Passionately impartial and locally engaged
- Inherently works against key negative narratives undermining public support for higher education:
  - vs. Ivory towers and narrow silos
  - vs. Glorified job training/student as customer/benefits as primarily individual
  - vs. Liberal/Progressive capture
  - vs. Corporate capture