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## Opinion

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### MY TURN: Creating new civic leaders

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By Amy Gibans McGlashan

As students head back to campus this fall, Vermont colleges and universities are educating them for more than just satisfying careers. The health of our democracy depends on an active, informed citizenry, requiring the development of a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes -- skills that are important also in the workplace and global society.

"The need to resolve complex problems intelligently places an ever greater demand on higher education -- a demand for graduates who have a profound understanding of what it means to be a citizen; graduates capable of an interest larger than self-interest; graduates capable of helping this country to be not simply a strong competitor but a responsible and effective leader in a complicated world," said Frank Newman, former president of the Education Commission of the States.

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### My Turn

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Vermont higher education is committed to these civic purposes. In 1999, 23 presidents banded together to create Vermont Campus Compact. VCC presidents believe that through sustained student, faculty and institutional engagement with communities, higher education can help prepare tomorrow's civic and social leaders while strengthening communities and improving lives.

Vermont Campus Compact has a unique approach; it isn't about partisan politics and it's more than studying government. Instead, students in all academic disciplines can be engaged in a learning method called "service-learning." Service-learning incorporates community problem-solving into the curriculum, giving students real-world experience in their field while meeting the needs of their communities.

Colleges and universities across the state are increasingly adopting service-learning as an integral component of the education experience, including those nearby. Service projects such as these provide real value to communities while being tied to concrete academic goals. University of Vermont students work with Burlington's Community and Economic Development Office to advance small business development and neighborhood revitalization, while engineering students help local companies determine economically and environmentally sustainable ways to reduce the volume of hazardous waste they need to treat and transport.

St. Michael's College anthropology students work with local refugees from Somalia, Congo, Rwanda and Vietnam. In a Community College of Vermont introduction to human services class, students produced a video for the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging to help the agency recruit volunteers.

Why this focus on service-learning? In addition to providing much-needed services, service-learning bolsters academic achievement and contributes to college retention. It has also been shown to increase voting and other forms of civic participation, develop problem-solving skills, increase work force readiness

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Having attended and graduated from multiple Vermont colleges, I am not sure having students learn about civics at them is the best thing unless one wants a socialist society. Sorry but they may claim to be nonpartisan in their approach but the reality is that most faculty members are far left and that shines through. College kids are easily influenced-

Posted: Tue Oct 16, 2007 7:32 am

You know, this serious and thoughtful editorial is cancelled out (and then some) by the dumb cartoon next to it in the print edition.

What kind of jerk chooses your political cartoons, Free Press? Osama bin Ladin? Noam Chomsky? Karl Marx's granddaughter? They're not only loony-left partisan - they're often so misleading that they're just plain stupid.

You could do better.

Posted: Mon Oct 15, 2007 6:54 pm

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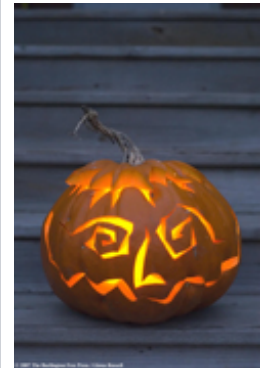
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and ability to work well with others, and improve social/civic skills and behaviors. In other words, it helps prepare students to become responsible leaders -- both in their professions and in their communities.


Service-learning is one facet of a broader movement to advance higher education's role in serving the public good. VCC has seen campus support for this work rise steeply in recent years. Students are now spending more time on service than they have in decades. A study released in April reported that 43.6 percent of Vermont's college and university students regularly volunteer, compared to 29.6 percent nationally, ranking Vermont fifth, and representing a 12.9 percent increase since 1986. Last year, students at Campus Compact institutions nationally contributed \$7.1 billion worth of service.

VCC just completed six years of funding from Learn and Serve, a federal program that supports service-learning at all levels. One hundred percent of VCC member institutions now offer service-learning courses. The number of faculty using service-learning has increased five-fold; 97 percent of them report service-learning has improved learning outcomes. More important, 75 percent of more than 670 community agencies with whom VCC members partner reported more community needs being met as a result of their higher education partnership.

VCC institutions recognize the inextricable link between research, teaching, and outreach, and the well-being of individuals and communities in Vermont. Higher education is prepared to do its part to prepare 21st century global citizens and problem solvers while strengthening Vermont.

Amy Gibans McGlashan of Ripton is executive director of Vermont Campus Compact.

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