

Bard College: An Ecosystem of Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Despite its moderate size and rural location, Bard's civic engagement efforts resonate locally, nationally, and internationally, and have significant public policy impacts. Bard has achieved success by making engagement central to its institutional mission, viewing liberal arts and sciences education as both a means and an end of civic engagement efforts, and forging an "ecosystem of engagement" that encourages organizational engineers, links student-led and institutional initiatives, and unites a network of partners across the globe.

Keywords: liberal arts, liberal education, early college, institutional engagement, civic engagement, international partnerships

Bard College identifies itself as "a private institution in the public interest." Having spent most of its 160-year history as a small institution, first as a preparatory college for the Episcopal church and then as an institution emphasizing the arts and humanities, it has grown into a vibrant liberal arts and sciences institution enrolling more than 6,000 students annually in degree programs across the United States and the world. What is unique about Bard is that its leadership has not simply paid lip service to the link between education and civic engagement and shunted engagement activities to a few isolated offices (Musil, 2003; Battistoni, Longo, & Jayanandhan, 2013). Instead, it sees civic engagement as central to its mission and has developed programs that have significant impacts locally, nationally, and globally. It has done this despite being under-resourced, with a fraction of the endowment of other highly selective liberal arts colleges, let alone major universities.

In this reflective essay, I will primarily seek to answer the following question: What distinguishes Bard's approach to civic engagement? In so doing, I will highlight three intertwined factors: (1) the use of liberal arts and sciences education, particularly in underserved communities, as both a means and an end for civic engagement ef-

forts; (2) Bard's success in creating an "ecosystem of engagement" that has shaped the institution's main campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, and Bard's network of affiliates and partners across the globe; and (3) the virtuous circle that links student engagement and institutional engagement.

Bard's "ecosystem of engagement" is worth examining because it provides lessons for other higher education institutions. It demonstrates that with determination, fortitude, and a willingness to tolerate risk, a rural, primarily undergraduate institution can be civically engaged in meaningful ways locally, nationally, and globally. It also demonstrates the unwavering power of liberal education as both a tool and objective of civic engagement efforts. Finally, it demonstrates the capacity for institutions to tap into the idealism of students to develop initiatives that have a salutary effect on people and public policy.

LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES EDUCATION AS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: SCOPE AND IMPACT

Andrew Latham of Project Pericles states that civic engagement "is a contemporary expression of the historic liberal arts

mission of preparing students for public life as citizens and leaders” and “responding to the social needs of the local and global communities in which we live” (Latham, 2003). His description highlights two important components of the understanding of civic education: “student as citizen,” the traditional notion of education as preparing students to become engaged citizens who will contribute to their communities and country (Mathews, 2015); and “institution as citizen” (Thomas, 2000), which positions colleges or universities not simply as facilitators of civic engagement within and outside the classroom, but as civic actors in their own right through what can be called “institutional engagement.”

Bard seeks to merge these two by playing to its strength and harnessing the progressive and democratizing values of liberal education. Its mission statement asserts, “Bard acts at the intersection of education and civil society, extending liberal arts and sciences education to communities in which it has been underdeveloped, inaccessible, or absent.” Bard’s engagement with liberal arts and sciences education as a tool of social change can be witnessed through numerous programs, from the Lifetime Learning Institute in Annandale-on-Hudson, which provides nearly 70 classes annually for 300 local lifetime learners, to the Clemente Course in the Humanities—a not-for-profit that, in collaboration with Bard, offers free, year-long credit-bearing courses in liberal arts and sciences education to non-traditional adult learners, encompassing more than 300 students in 20 locations across the country. Before describing how Bard’s ecosystem operates, I will examine three areas that best illustrate Bard’s work in using liberal education as a tool of social change: early college learning, prison education, and international liberal education.

Early College Education

The Bard High School Early Colleges (BHSECs) provide a unique opportunity for high school students across the country

to begin a rigorous liberal arts and sciences education. They are based on Bard College at Simon’s Rock in Massachusetts, a 50-year-old institution granting Associate of Arts (AA) and Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees that became part of Bard in 1979. The BHSECs are four-year public high schools that—in grades 11 and 12—provide students with a two-year, tuition-free college course of study in the liberal arts and sciences, taught by university-level faculty, that can lead to an associate’s degree. The early colleges operate in cooperation with local boards of education and are situated in five locations: Manhattan, Queens, Newark, Baltimore, and Cleveland, with a new early college set to open in Washington, DC, in 2019. Bard has also launched new and innovative models of early college, building on the growth and success of the BHSEC model. These new approaches include partnerships with charter schools and with consortia of rural schools and include an AA-granting campus in New Orleans and a half-time early college program in Hudson, New York. In all, Bard enrolls nearly 3,000 students in early college programs, with more than 1,250 in degree-granting programs. Bard’s Vice President for Early Colleges Stephen Tremaine calls this extension of liberal education “community enrollment,” which he explicitly juxtaposes with the more common phrase and institutional practice of “community service.” Community enrollment means sharing the resources that define an academic institution, instead of “serving” a community in possibly useful, but also potentially patronizing and even damaging, ways that, intentions notwithstanding, can exclude the community from the core institutional value: education (Tremaine, 2015).

Recent data and research demonstrate that the Bard Early College model is extraordinarily effective in positioning young people to succeed in higher education. In the BHSEC Class of 2018, 83% of students earned an AA degree along with a high school diploma, with many others receiving more than a year-and-a-half of col-

lege credit. In Newark, where only 13% of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher, 100% of the class of 2018 graduated with a high school diploma and 72% also received an associate's degree. To date, more than 90% of BHSEC graduates have completed their baccalaureate degrees, a significantly higher percentage than the 59% national rate. This is particularly impressive given that the BHSECs are public schools and approximately 70% of BHSEC students come from underrepresented communities. Indeed, an independent, quasi-experimental matched-pair analysis on the BHSEC campuses in New York City not only demonstrated better outcomes in terms of bachelor degree completion compared with traditional, selective, and specialized high schools, but that African-American students at BHSECs were twice as likely to finish a BA or Bachelor of Science (BS) as their peers at traditional public schools, and males were 40% more likely to do so.

To get a sense of the scope, in 2019, Bard's network of public early colleges will award over 500 AA degrees, tuition free, to a student body of whom half are the first in their families to earn a college degree. If this student body were eligible for federal Pell grants, 68% would qualify. Bard is now working with the American Talent Initiative, the leading advocate for expanding "access and opportunity" to "top colleges and universities" for lower-income students, to highlight the efficacy of early college as a tool to promote social and economic diversity within student bodies.

Prison Education

For incarcerated individuals, the power of liberal arts and science education is realized by the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI). BPI operates AA and BA liberal arts programs in six correctional facilities in New York State, enrolling more than 300 students annually, making it the largest degree-granting prison education program of its kind in the country. BPI also founded and leads the Consortium for the Liberal Arts in Prison, a network of partner pro-

grams in 15 states that brings other institutions, particularly liberal arts institutions, into the prison education process.

BPI not only provides an opportunity for its incarcerated students to reach their potential, but has also helped reshape the regional and national debate over the cost and impact of incarceration (an issue that, uncharacteristically for the United States, has been taken up by both sides of the political spectrum), established efficacy of prison education programs, and, most importantly, highlighted the capacity, dignity, and worth of incarcerated individuals. BPI students who have been released from prison have extraordinarily low recidivism rates: 2.5% for those who have completed degrees and 4% for students who have taken even one class. This compares favorably with national rates of 40% to 50% (Karpowitz, 2017; Zimmerman, 2017). More than 20 BPI graduates have gone on to pursue graduate degrees at places like Columbia, New York University, and Yale, with many specializing in public health. The victory over Harvard by the BPI Debate Union at Eastern New York Correctional Facility in the fall of 2015 brought tremendous national and international attention to the program, but even before that, BPI's success contributed to the Obama administration's decision to create a pilot program to reintroduce federal Pell grants (that had been cut off in 1994) to support prison education (New York Times, 2015). BPI's success and its advocacy dating back to the presidency of George W. Bush also helped pave the way for the bi-partisan criminal justice reform efforts that became law in 2018. BPI has also influenced a number of state governments, particularly in terms of policies that support education of incarcerated individuals.

International Liberal Education

Internationally, Bard offers four-year undergraduate degrees in liberal arts and sciences—as well as select graduate programs in teaching and the arts—all of which represent radical alternatives to the

predominant educational models that exist in the countries in which they operate. Instead of strict curriculums and lecture-based teaching shaped by Humboldtian and Soviet models, they feature flexible curriculums, breadth as well as depth, and student-centered approaches to teaching. The international programs include dual-degree partnerships with the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Kyrgyzstan, Al-Quds University in Palestine, St. Petersburg State University in Russia, and Bard College Berlin (BCB), which is a branch campus offering U.S. and German accredited degrees. Long-time Bard President Leon Botstein has made clear the link between education and civic engagement, stating: “That mission, the set of values that directs the college’s international work, is the conviction that education—and the liberal arts, with its emphasis on critical thinking and the open exchange of ideas, in particular—can be a force for freedom and democracy” (Fischer, 2014).

Bard’s international programs resonate on three levels. First, they successfully contribute to educational reform by helping establish liberal arts and sciences as an accredited form of education in places where it has shallow roots. In Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Palestine, Bard’s partners have established the first accredited degrees of their kind in the respective countries. St. Petersburg State University’s Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the first such faculty at a major Russian university. Second, Bard’s approach to academic partnerships, which emphasizes reciprocity, tolerance, and respect (Gillespie, 2009), is viewed as a model for collaboration and is often cited as such at academic conferences, in publications, and in university-governmental forums (Fisher, 2014; Becker & Gillespie, 2017). Finally, the international partnerships have tremendous impacts on students and institutions, shaping graduates and radiating the impact of liberal education beyond the specific partnerships to other faculty and higher educational institutions in the country. In the case of the Master of Arts in

Teaching Program at Al-Quds Bard College of Arts and Sciences (AQB), the first accredited MAT program in the region, the 450+ in-service teachers who have participated in the program teach more than 95,000 students in 120 Palestinian schools on the West Bank and in Jerusalem, creating more interactive, student-centered learning environments that contribute to higher motivation among students. Many of the program’s graduates have become principals and regional educational leaders and have contributed substantially to the recent secondary school reforms implemented by the Palestinian Ministry of Education.

ECOSYSTEM OF ENGAGEMENT

Bard’s reach and impact are made possible by what I term an “ecosystem of engagement.” I use the metaphor of an ecosystem to highlight the complex interactions that emerge between and among an interconnected network of people and institutions forming a dynamic and complex whole that is collectively more diverse, innovative, adaptive, and resilient than the constituent parts (Pickett & Cadenasso, 2002; Mars, Bronstein, & Lusch, 2012; Isaksen, Puccio, & Treffinger, 1993).

The health and growth of the Bard ecosystem is made possible by an “enabling environment” that encourages and values creativity and social entrepreneurialism among faculty, administrators, and students, and underlines the institution’s preparedness to take risks, especially where important issues of public policy are at stake. This enabling environment begins with the foregrounding of civic engagement within Bard’s institutional priorities. The college celebrates its historic role as a refuge for distinguished writers, artists, intellectuals, and scientists fleeing Nazi Europe in the 1930s and 1940s; its decision in 1956 to host more than 300 Hungarian student refugees who participated in the revolt against the communist regime; and its role as a haven for fleeing intellectuals from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa since

the 1980s. This tradition has been carried forward by Bard College Berlin, which in academic year 2018-19 has more than 30 refugees, primarily from Syria, in its Program in International Education and Social Change, outstripping many public German universities. Currently, civic engagement features prominently in the college's mission statement, its website, promotional materials, and recruitment and development campaigns. It remains important in internal college deliberations as well, from faculty meetings to the student newspaper, which for many years had a regular section called "Bardiverse."

The "keystone" of Bard's ecosystem of engagement is the undergraduate liberal arts college on the main campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, where Bard's academic and administrative centers are situated (Pickett & Cadenasso, 2002). However, Bard's ecosystem of engagement is much broader: It encompasses an interconnected network of vibrant sub-ecosystems, comprising affiliates and partner institutions, and the faculty, staff, and students who populate them. The ecosystem and the sub-ecosystems that constitute it are formally connected through a scaffolding of organizational structures, partnership agreements, and, in most cases, common accreditation. The Bard degree is a pivotal element in binding the ecosystem's different elements and creating a resiliency that has seen projects endure not just years, but often decades. Memorandums of understanding, partnerships, and programs litter the academic landscape, but are too often linked to discrete grants and projects and discarded at the first signs of adversity. Degree programs, on the other hand, involve such an investment and commitment that they can better endure the inevitable challenges and controversies that academic endeavors entail.

Substantively, the ecosystem and sub-ecosystems are connected by a complex web of shared teaching principles and practices, and shared curricular elements that serve as common frames of reference,

providing points of departure for collaboration and innovation. Included in these are a vigorous promotion of student-centered learning, small classes, an emphasis on written work, a general education curriculum, and several of Bard's curricular pillars, including the following:

- *Language and Thinking*, which underlines the iterative process between thought and expression;
- a general education curriculum that includes *First-* and in some cases *Second-Year Seminars*, which emphasize thematic analysis of core texts, seminar-style discussions, and extensive writing of analytic papers;
- *Distribution requirements* that oblige students to take courses in four areas: the arts; social sciences; languages and literature; and the natural sciences, mathematics and computing;
- and for BA recipients, *Moderation*, a process of being accepted into a major, and *Senior Project*, a year-long, original focused project that emerges from the student's cumulative academic experience.

Most of the ecosystem explicitly embraces civic engagement as a principle, with student-led initiatives and institutional engagement helping to define the individual sub-ecosystems' identities. Ideas and practices related to curricula, teaching methods, and civic engagement cascade across the ecosystem, strengthening and nourishing the sub-ecosystems and networks that bind the ecosystem together and generating new innovations and initiatives. The approach to institutional engagement, in turn, expands the boundaries of the ecosystem. For example, faculty from Smolny work in several Russian institutions, from Kaliningrad to Siberia, promoting student-centered learning and the Language and Thinking program, while faculty at Al-Quds Bard work with multiple Palestinian secondary institutions and refugee teachers in Jordan helping to further core institutional practices, partic-

ularly where it comes to student-empowering pedagogy.

The ecosystem of engagement derives its energy from the power of ideas, particularly the belief in the capacity of liberal arts and sciences education to educate, teach students how to think critically and express themselves, encourage individual agency, and promote informed citizenship. As I wrote in an essay entitled, “What a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education Is... and Is Not,” liberal arts and sciences education “is not a magic bullet that will solve all of society’s problems. However, when properly constituted, it offers a coherent approach that endows students with abilities that will prepare them for a lifetime of civic engagement, learning, and employment” (Becker, 2014; Becker 2015).

The most important connections across the network are made through the faculty. For example, Bard’s first major international partnership, Smolny College (now the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences), began as an effort to rethink the social sciences in Russia, and was initiated by faculty members from Bard and St. Petersburg State University. Faculty across the network run and participate together in teaching and curricular workshops, academic conferences, and joint research projects. They have also collaborated to develop joint and common “network” courses on a variety of themes, including hate, global citizenship, nationalism, migration, freedom of expression, and civic engagement. In academic year 2018-19, 27 faculty taught four network courses to nearly 300 students across six campuses. These courses share a number of readings, in-class activities, and homework assignments, and they link students through “virtual classes,” dialogical notebooks, keynote lectures, and debates that expose them to different experiences and perspectives that contextualize and animate the themes studied. Additionally, several faculty have migrated from one part of the network to another, bringing lessons learned from teaching and adapting similar courses in different and, at times, challeng-

ing environments. Several Annandale faculty regularly teach in the Bard Prison Initiative and the Clemente program: This year, 23 of 88 BPI faculty and six of the seven faculty of the Clemente program in Kingston, New York, are based in Annandale. A number of BPI and early college faculty have gone on to teach in Annandale as needs and opportunities emerge. A steady stream of faculty from international partners have spent semesters in Annandale and vice versa. Each year, a half-dozen early college, BPI, and international partner faculty teach in Annandale’s Language and Thinking program for first year students, and a BPI faculty alum now heads the program.

The view that liberal education can be an important and transformative tool is underlined by leaders within the ecosystem who are playing the role that Mars, Bronstein, and Lusch call “organizational engineers,” and who “replicate and adapt innovations across multiple settings” (Mars, Bronstein, & Lusch, 2012). In this context, a wide array of people are engineers and liberal arts proselytizers, espousing the power of liberal education, adapting some of Bard’s approaches to new environments, and generating new ideas that reverberate across the ecosystem, including in Annandale proper. This includes Aleksei Kudrin, Russia’s long-term finance minister and Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at St. Petersburg State University, who is a strong proponent of spreading liberal arts and sciences education across Russia (Kudrin, 2015); Ruth Zisman, Faculty Adviser to the Bard Debate Union, who has shaped debate not only as a competition, but as a form of learning and public engagement across Bard’s national and international networks; Thomas Keenan, head of Bard’s Human Rights Program and Project, who created the United States’ first undergraduate major in human rights and helped adapt successfully the curriculum to AUCA, AQB, and Smolny; and Francesca Gamber, the Principal of the Bard High School Early College

in Baltimore, who has helped pilot an early college course on civic engagement.

The flow of information, ideas and people within the ecosystem is multi-directional: Inputs come from a variety of sources and do not flow exclusively from Annandale. As Susan Gillespie, the founding director of Bard's Institute for International Liberal Education and herself an organizational engineer, has written of Bard's international programs, Bard's conception of partnership means that "we make a conscious attempt to listen, to be aware of the needs, goals, feelings, and ideas of our overseas colleagues" and that "we consciously seek to work in ways that serve not only our own personal or institutional or national ends (though these are all important), but those of our partners as well." As stated above, these partnerships involve reciprocity, tolerance, and respect, and "challenge and enable us to be more effective in learning with and from, not just about, people in other countries" (Gillespie, 2009).

As programs move across the network, they adapt to new environments and needs. The teaching initiative that has had the greatest resonance across the ecosystem and partner and affiliate sub-ecosystems is the Language and Thinking (L&T) program. L&T is the signature program of Bard's Institute for Writing and Thinking, which examines the link between thought and expression while encouraging a careful reading of texts, regular writing, and small class discussions. At its core, it uses student-centered liberal arts teaching methodologies to promote intellectual inquiry and critical thought, and, perhaps most importantly, to foster student agency, which is critical in areas where students are used to being passive recipients of information. Bard's international partners, in particular, see L&T as an antidote to the rote learning that is the norm in so many secondary school systems across the globe and as an excellent introduction to liberal arts and sciences education. Organizational engineers have helped adapt the program to new environments

across the globe, from Berlin to Burma. Denis Akhapiin helped develop a Russian version of L&T for Smolny, set up a Center for Writing and Thinking in St. Petersburg, and, with Smolny colleagues, has helped establish an L&T curriculum and/or promote other Institute for Writing and Thinking teaching methods at more than a dozen higher education institutions across Russia and Russian-speaking countries, as a part of their larger efforts to promote liberal arts and sciences education. Similarly, at Al-Quds, Lucy Nusseibeh, who at the time headed Al-Quds University's Institute for Modern Media, led an effort to adapt L&T into Arabic, so that in addition to the 80 to 100 incoming first-year students at Al-Quds Bard participating in L&T in English, an additional 2,000 entering students from all of Al-Quds University's academic programs take L&T in Arabic during their first year. L&T methods have also been incorporated into a number of student-led civic engagement projects across the network, in which trained student leaders conduct workshops for middle and high school students locally and internationally.

As the network has grown, shared learning and the dissemination of knowledge within the ecosystem is increasingly taking place between institutions in interactions that are not mediated by or through Annandale. Al-Quds Bard, for example, has helped AUCA develop a Second Year Seminar and a Master of Arts in Teaching program, while AUCA has helped Al-Quds Bard develop a preparatory program for students who are weak in English. Smolny has helped a number of institutions in Russia and the former Soviet space develop student-centered teaching methods and general education curriculums. Just as Bard in Annandale has helped partners and affiliates develop and adapt student-centered teaching methods and the core pillars of its curriculum, it has been the beneficiary of insights of faculty and administrators from partner institutions and affiliates who view these courses and processes from different perspectives. Bard has incorpo-

rated some of these curricular and pedagogic approaches and course materials originating from the network into Annandale-based courses and programs. Bard College Berlin's interdisciplinary curriculum and robust second-year seminars, which grew out of its predecessor, the European College of Liberal Arts, has been a big motivation behind a new general curricular review in Annandale, as have the Second-Year seminars at the BHSECs, BPI, and AQB. There is by necessity some level of oversight and quality control from Annandale where degrees are at stake, but such activities are secondary to collaborations and collegiality. When directors of First Year Seminar from multiple institutions gather together, they do not discuss the adoption of one cookie-cutter model, but meet as colleagues, sharing overlapping but also distinct approaches to readings, assignments, and evaluation rubrics. Similarly, when "network" courses are being forged, they are done so on a basis of mutual respect and equality.

VIRTUOUS CIRCLE: STUDENT-LED INITIATIVES AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPACTS

One of the important elements of Bard's ecosystem of engagement is the virtuous circle, or feedback loop, that exists between student-led initiatives and institutional initiatives, nourishing the ecosystem and enhancing its stability. Student leaders serve as organizational engineers and student-led initiatives become institutional initiatives that maintain student engagement.

The Trustee Leader Scholar (TLS) program has served as a venue for student engagement, a model for network partners, and a source of institutional innovation. According to Bard Dean for Social Action Paul Marienthal, who oversees TLS in Annandale, the program is guided by "an unwavering belief in each student's ability to own his or her own work," and "a willingness to take risks to make a difference in difficult circumstances locally, nationally, and internationally" (Becker, Cannan,

Campbell, Marienthal, & Thomson, 2012). In Annandale, TLS annually sponsors 30-35 projects led by 50+ student leaders who in turn involve roughly 10 additional student participants per project. TLS forms the core of student engagement: More than half of Bard students participate in long-term projects, with many others participating in one-day events like the Martin Luther King Day of Engagement. Some TLS projects involve students engaging with local organizations, such as the Astor Services for Children and Families or the Red Hook ESL (English as a Second Language) Center; others are more national or international in scope, such as the Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative, which brings 10-20 Bard students to the West Bank each summer to run educational and civic engagement programs for students in isolated communities. The project is now run in collaboration with AQB. TLS projects are distinguished by their sustained engagement: Roughly two-thirds of current TLS projects have been running five years or more, and one-third for 10 years or more, which is particularly noteworthy since the program was founded in 1997. The longevity is a testament to student empowerment that characterizes TLS and redounds through the ecosystem: These projects have lives across multiple cohorts of TLS students and it is students, not the institution, who decide to continue a project.

The TLS program is particularly important because it highlights how Bard's ecosystem contains a mutually reinforcing flow between the notions of student as citizen and institution as citizen described earlier. Several of Bard's most successful institutional initiatives—the Bard Prison Initiative, the Bard Early College in New Orleans, Brothers at Bard (an academic enrichment mentoring program for young men of color from underserved backgrounds in the city of Kingston), La Voz (the only Spanish language magazine in the Hudson Valley), and the Bard Farm (which produces more than 20,000 pounds annually of vegetables served on campus and sold in the local community)—began as student ideas, incu-

bated as TLS projects, and then were adopted and elevated by the institution, which provides guidance, resources, and academic oversight and accreditation where appropriate. Most of the projects retain a student-led component, but they transform into far larger and high-impact endeavors, often with significant public policy impacts. In several cases, the TLS students who began the projects have become Bard administrators. Some continue to oversee the projects they founded, like Mariel Fiori, who founded La Voz, and Dariel Vasquez, founder of Brothers at Bard. Others continue to have a connection with their projects, but have taken on larger institutional roles, including Max Kenner, co-founder of the Bard Prison Initiative, who is now Executive Director of BPI and Vice President for Institutional Initiatives, and Stephen Tremaine, the founder of the Bard Early College in New Orleans, who is now Vice President for Early Colleges.

The virtuous circle that is formed between student-led initiatives and institutional initiatives helps the college thrive. As Tremaine wrote:

Blurring the lines between student initiative and institutional action has... been a powerful way for Bard to challenge conservative tendencies in the college, to broaden the institution's imagination, and to exploit—to good effect—the potent naivety of undergraduates looking to take on ambitious issues. (Tremaine, 2015).

In supporting, adopting, and celebrating transformative projects initiated by students, the college fosters further ideas and initiatives and creates new student communities that strengthen and expand the boundaries of the ecosystem (Tremaine, 2015).

The TLS model of student-led initiatives is being adopted and adapted by Bard's international partners including AUCA, AQB, and Bard College Berlin—which has made civic engagement one of its core organizing principles—and by the European Humanities University, a Belorussian university in exile in Lithuania, with which

Bard has a partnership but not a dual-degree program. Several students at Smolny have also initiated their own projects, although circumstances in Russia limit their scope. Projects cover a wide range of activities, from gender empowerment to promoting debate and Model United Nations (MUN) in middle and high schools, to efforts that seek to open up spaces of free discussion and dialogue for youth. There have also been cross-campus collaborations. For example, students from AQB, BCB, and Bard in Annandale teamed together to organize the first university-level Model United Nations conference in Palestine. Students from Bard, AQB, BCB, and Smolny participated in the Bard Palestinian Youth Initiative, which runs ESL programs and debate programs for school children in isolated Palestinian communities. All of the partner institutions are now modeling their debate programs on the Bard Debate Union, which, in addition to supporting competitive debate, emphasizes the importance of public debates on social, political, and cultural issues and outreach to area schools. Most campuses have between 15 and 20 student members, with Smolny's attracting upwards of 50 students per year. Debate and Model UN are particularly important in some of the venues where Bard's partnerships operate, because they allow for the airing of issues that might not otherwise be addressed publicly. Debaters from Bard regularly help support the research of the debaters at Eastern NY Correctional Facility (who have no access to the Internet), have assisted international partners with the development of debate programs, and have participated in 'virtual' debates, which unite students from multiple campuses in public debates using videoconference technology.

The TLS model is now being adapted to the early college environment, with an experimental program launched at BHSEC Baltimore in 2017-18, a new program launched in Queens in 2018-19, and plans to grow in Cleveland and beyond in 2019. The Baltimore program included the first Civic Engagement academic course,

with new courses launched this year at BHSEC Queens and in Annandale. It is likely that some of the initiatives that emerge from early college students will follow the pattern in Annandale and be transformed into institutional initiatives.

LESSONS FROM BARD

Bard College believes that higher education institutions should serve as civically engaged actors at the nexus of education and civil society. Bard has been transformed by making civic engagement a central part of the institution's mission and identity and by deploying liberal education as both an instrument and a goal of its civic engagement efforts. Its academic and civic missions are realized through mutually reinforcing efforts that bind students, faculty, and administrators in the pursuit of learning, idealism, and active civic participation. Bard's ecosystem of engagement resonates across the institution and radiates through the sub-ecosystems of Bard's affiliates and partners, creating linkages, generating learning opportunities, empowering students and faculty to be civically engaged, fostering ideas, and deepening the impact of engagement projects. If, as Barnett contends, the "civic university" is "conscious of its responsibilities towards society and fulfilling a 'public service' role as a way of acting out those responsibilities" (2007), then Bard is a quintessential "civic college."

As such, Bard's "ecosystem of engagement" can provide important lessons for other institutions of higher education. It demonstrates that small institutions can impact public policy nationally and have significant impacts globally, but most of its lessons are applicable to any size institution. It shows that liberal arts and sciences education can be an effective tool of civic engagement. It proves that students can be vibrant sources of ideas and leadership and demonstrates the capacity for student-led projects to transform into robust institutional initiatives. Bard also demonstrates that

when it comes to ambitious national and international initiatives, particularly where issues of public policy are at stake, institutional engagement is pivotal, and old-fashioned institutional leadership can play a decisive role in determining success.

Bard's approach also demonstrates additional institutional benefits within the most important constituencies for an academic institution: faculty and students. Its reputation for civic engagement and engagement across different geographies has helped it attract and retain outstanding faculty and attract innovative administrators who participate in and/or lead engagement projects, contributing to the ecosystem's dynamism. Engagement opportunities within the ecosystem have also served as sources of renewal and in some cases reinvention, particularly for Annandale-based faculty from more traditional backgrounds, who have sometimes experienced a staleness of repetitive teaching of undergraduates. This in turn has positively impacted instruction of undergraduates on the Annandale campus (Buruma, 2005). Conversely, for some of the faculty based at some of the more distant hubs in the network, the opportunity to participate in international conferences, joint teaching, and joint research with others in the network can help minimize intellectual isolation and lead to a more sustained commitment where location and circumstances can be challenging.

Bard's institutional engagement, though designed first and foremost for the educational benefit of others, has also enhanced the educational experience of its undergraduates in Annandale-on-Hudson. Whether students are studying in the classroom in New York with some of the nearly 50 exchange students from Bard's partner institutions who spend a semester at Bard each year, participating in the study away programs offered by Bard's international partners, taking a "network course" with students and faculty from across the globe, participating in a network "virtual debate," or sharing a class with, debating, tutoring, or performing music for incarcerated stu-

dents at BPI (which around 150 Annandale students do each year), they are learning more effectively due to the diversity of perspectives that the network brings to their learning experience. Because of the networked nature of the relationship, students are also forging bonds and friendships that can take them from a classroom in Annandale, to a joint assignment in a network class, to a summer program in Bishkek, to a network student civic engagement conference in Budapest.

These relationships speak to the important lessons that Bard's "deep partnerships" can have for how civically engaged institutions can cooperate internationally. It is true that these partnerships can be more challenging than the stand-alone overseas branch campuses of many major American universities, which are often as much about profit, or benefits to American students, as they are about spreading knowledge. However, when partnerships succeed, there are multiple benefits in terms of curricular and pedagogic innovation, professional development opportunities, and the myriad learning and co-curricular opportunities offered to students. American students in particular benefit from the opportunity to study away at institutions in which they are immersed among regular students and where the educational environment feels familiar and welcomes the open exchange of ideas, thus allowing them to have greater access to the culture, history, and ideas of the host country and its people. This provides an enriching educational experience and contrasts with "island" programs in which students and teachers from the host country may play a limited role.

Bard's engagement activities have also helped with student enrollment in Annandale-on-Hudson. The Bard Early Colleges, which enroll more than 3,000 students, have increasingly served as a source of recruitment for Annandale. This is new. For many years, Bard intentionally limited recruitment of early college students so as to enhance its national reputation and emphasize its public policy impact while

avoiding the appearance of a conflict of interest. However, given the growth of the early colleges, the fact that students are exposed to the same ideas and teaching methods as students studying in Annandale, and the extraordinary diversity of the early college student body, the early colleges are now not only promoting the liberal arts and civic engagement in underrepresented communities through "community enrollment," they are positively impacting the diversity of the student body in Annandale while expanding opportunity for community enrollees.

Bard's civic engagement projects and the ecosystem as a whole have had tremendous sustainability, durability, and flexibility: Smolny, the longest-running of its dual-degree partnerships, is in its 21st year; the Bard Prison Initiative and Bard Early Colleges already celebrated their 15th year; and many of the student-led projects of the TLS program, whose theme is "bold sustained engagement," are more than a decade old. There are many reasons for this. First, Bard's ecosystem of engagement has assured that there are many people at Bard—students, faculty, administrators, and trustees—who are committed to the institution's mission and to the specific projects that are part of that ecosystem. Second, Bard's preparedness to place the quality of its degree at stake in prisons, high schools, and its international partnerships signals the institution's commitment and enhances its responsibilities and obligations to its partner and civic programs. Third, the centrality of engagement efforts to the institution's core mission makes them a fundraising priority.

This is not to say that Bard's ecosystem of engagement is without challenges and frailties. One common criticism centers on money: Critics, including parents of Annandale students and some faculty and administrators, complain that resources that are meant to support "them" are spent on "others." There are several answers for this. First, as stated above, many of the engagement activities enhance the learning experi-

ence of students in Annandale. Second, the network helps undergraduates in Annandale better understand the meaning of their educational experience. A student in Annandale knows that he or she has classmates—members of the same academic community, engaging with a similar curriculum and facing similar intellectual challenges—who are incarcerated, who are in high school in Cleveland, or who are in Bishkek. They meet them in person through exchanges, through virtual classes, or when, in the case of BPI, released students walk across the same stage as they at commencement. As a number of alums have noted, this knowledge and shared experience animates their understanding of their own education and the connection between education and social change. They have come to see the fact that close to 40% of all students enrolled in US-based degree programs at Bard are Pell-eligible as a cause for celebration and not of jealousy. Third, even at Bard the net financial effect of the civic engagement programs is positive. Bard is and has always been a relatively poor institution, in part because of its size and in part because of its origins as a preparatory school for the Episcopal seminary (even Eleanor Roosevelt supported Bard's efforts to stave off bankruptcy in the 1930s). Paradoxically, this has been a blessing. Bard's ecosystem of engagement has survived and thrived due to the philanthropy of trustees and donors who have no formal relationship to the institution and who give not because they are alumni, but because they believe in the institution's mission and support its social impact. Bard's largest foundational supporter, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), has supported Bard's efforts not least because of an overlap in values and the support Bard has made to OSF's programmatic development. Internationally, Bard helped convince OSF's Higher Education Support Program to promote liberal arts and sciences education as a key component of educational reform in Central and Eastern Europe in the mid-1990s. Domestically, BPI helped shape the OSF U.S. programs' support for

prison education in the 2000s. Bard may face financial challenges, as do many colleges, but they are not due to civic engagement.

There are more salient challenges. Bard's ecosystem of engagement, and the sub-ecosystems that constitute it, receive negative inputs like any organizational or biological ecosystem. The institution's leaders at times feel spread thin; being engaged around the globe means that the tasks of administrators are not governed by normal daily rhythms, work-weeks, or academic calendars. People who need order and clear job descriptions often find Bard frustrating. Sometimes faculty and administrators are so busy establishing new programs that they do not take full advantage of opportunities to deepen engagements and connect parts of the network of partnerships and affiliates as well as the opportunities that they afford. Faculty, administrators, and students are human and can behave badly, damaging relationships that bind the sub-ecosystems together. Exogenous environmental factors can also be disruptive: Operating in high-impact, high-risk environments poses myriad challenges, particularly as geopolitical conditions across the globe worsen. Partnerships can create challenges when there are leadership changes or partner institutions face internal difficulties. Bard was called on to quit its partnership with Al-Quds University when a small group of student-activists unrelated to the Al-Quds Bard partnership held protests that advocated violence; and Bard was forced to forego OSF support for Smolny when OSF was banned from operating in Russia under the country's new "undesirables" law. Even locally, Bard has been exposed to the vicissitudes of changing governance. The Bard early colleges are designed as partnerships with local governments, which can enhance long-term systemic impacts, but such arrangements can create greater uncertainties: Elected officials leave office, appointees can be replaced, and state legislatures may shift budgetary and policy priorities.

In spite of these challenges, Bard has demonstrated that its ecosystem of engagement and its commitment to exploring and exploiting the synergies between liberal education and civic engagement have had tremendous impacts on its main campus and on local, regional, national, and global communities. Bard in many ways has been fortunate in terms of its capacity to build its ecosystem of engagement. The fact that it remains under-resourced in comparison to its peer institutions has required it to be nimble and inventive and has fostered a preparedness to take risks. The programs in Bard's ecosystem of engagement are central to the mission of higher education to create and disseminate knowledge. This raises the more salient question: If an institution as under-resourced as Bard can have such an impact, what might institutions that are sitting on hundreds of millions and often billions of dollars in their endowments achieve were they to make bolder institutional commitments to civic engagement? At the end of the day, the profound impact of Bard's engagement efforts are such that there are very few projects that would not have been worth pursuing even if future financial constraints meant that Bard could no longer continue its engagement efforts. The effect on people, institutions, and government policies will be lasting, whatever the future may hold.

Bard demonstrates that by acting institutionally as engaged citizens, colleges and universities can enhance student learning, increase faculty satisfaction, disseminate knowledge, and help build a better society. It would be difficult to replicate what Bard has done, but by adapting elements of Bard's approach, particularly establishing civic engagement as a core institutional tenet, creating an ecosystem of engagement, and fostering the link between student-led engagement and institutional engagement, other colleges, urban or rural, large or small, could see new and unanticipated projects emerge that would, in turn, create their own virtuous circles, helping civic engagement, and the institutions, to thrive.

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