

**Michael Poliakoff:**

Welcome to Higher Ed Now. It's my privilege and indeed my honor to welcome Dr. Richard Haass. Dr. Haass is retiring from his position as president of the Nonpartisan Council on Foreign Relations. He has served the nation as a diplomat, as a policymaker in the Pentagon, the State Department, and the White House, both Democrat and Republican administrations, which makes him a well-suited author of his latest book, the Bill of Obligations, the 10 Habits of Good Citizens, which is all about the way that we can work most productively in this nation together. So it has a great, great pleasure to welcome him. He has been the recipient of many honors and we welcome our distinguished guest.

**Richard Haass:**

Michael, it's great to be with you.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

I was very taken by what I understood to be your impetus for writing this book. I'd been rather rattled by, in particular, by two great surveys that came out in 2022, the first from Pew that showed that over the last six years the percent of Americans who thought that members of the other party were immoral rose 30%. And those who felt that members of the other party were unintelligent rose 20%. And that was in and itself really rattling, especially since it followed that Quinnipiac poll that spring in which it showed that only 45% of Americans age 18 to 34, had the invasion of Russia been on our border instead of Ukraine, would've stayed to defend the country. And thus, when you wrote about the dangers and the disease that we have, it really struck quite a chord with me.

**Richard Haass:**

Yeah, there's another poll that showed a significant percentage of that same age group would be more prepared to marry someone of a different faith or different color than of a different party. I wasn't quite sure how to interpret that. Look, I think when a lot of these people see politics in particularly Washington, but also state houses and the like, they often see a degree of squabbling, gridlock, whatever. I can imagine easily why it's not the most attractive of images. Also, if you really think about it for a young person, say 30, 35 years old, imagine that they have been paying a degree of attention to politics to public life for say the last 15 or so years, 20 years at most. What have they seen? It began with 9/11. They saw a war in Iraq, a war in Afghanistan. Neither of which shall we say, the investment came close to being justified by the return.

They saw 2007, 2008 financial crisis more recently dealing with inflation and banking issues. They had the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a million Americans lost their lives, lives more broadly were disrupted. Middle class wages have largely remained stagnant for two decades, most recently say January 6th. So they look at government, they look at our democracy and they say to themselves, "Well, I see what it's doing to me. Pardon me, but I don't see what it's doing for me." So then when I hear that they're not particularly prepared to defend this country, I'm not surprised they don't associate the government or the country with success with delivering to them, and also getting ahead of ourselves, most of them have never studied civics, have never studied American history in any serious or systematic way. So they don't have an appreciation of where we've come from. And despite our mistakes and despite our flaws, there's so much to feel good about when it comes to this country. But they simply haven't been exposed to that.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

I recall listening to a podcast with Steven Smith, Yale professor who's just produced a very interesting book called *Reclaiming Patriotism in an Age of Extremes*, which I confess I haven't yet read, but I will be turning to fairly soon. But I recall in the podcast he told his colleagues what he was writing and he said that their expressions and their responses ranged from incredulity to disgust. And what I like so much about your book is that you're not for a moment taking us away from the challenges. You lay those out in the first part of the book, but then you give us a real recipe for making things better that culminates with the wonderful 10th commandment, not 10th amendment, but I'd like to put it in more biblical terms. The obligation to put the country first maybe for our audience, I should run through the others that lead up to that last obligation.

Be informed, get involved, stay open to compromise, remain civil, reject violence, value norms, promote the common good, respect government service, support the teaching of civics. That's obviously one that we're going to want to come back to because it's been a major focal point of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. And finally, in that wonderful comprehensive sense of patriotism, putting our country first, and I would be very grateful, I know our higher ed listeners would I if you'd share some of your thoughts about all of those obligations and perhaps as well why you're calling them obligations rather than the more common word "responsibilities."

**Richard Haass:**

Well, let me, if I may deal with them collectively and then we could take them one by one if you'd like. The whole reason to emphasize obligations is based upon my reading of American history, where rights for understandable reasons have been at the center of it. Obviously, the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments were a necessary condition in order to get the Constitution approved to get it ratified. Several states said, "We're not going to ratify this proposed constitution, whatever the flaws and failures of the articles of confederation, unless it comes with certain protections." Hence, the first 10 amendments and a lot of American history over the subsequent two and a half centuries. I would argue it can be feud in Lincolnian terms of trying to finish the unfinished work of America to narrow the gap between the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the realities.

And obviously it took a civil war, took a 14th amendment, took subsequent amendments, subsequent legislation and so forth. But I would argue, actually, while there's still a gap between our principles and our realities, there's still unfinished work. We've made considerable progress. Indeed, it's one of the hallmarks of democracies is they tend to be better able to fix their flaws, to correct their mistakes than other forms of government. But my argument is even if we somehow magically could finish that work and eliminate the gap between what we promise and what we deliver in the way of rights, it still wouldn't guarantee American democracy. And the simple reason is inevitably, rights collide. We're seeing it every day. Look at the abortion debate, the rights of the mother versus the rights of the unborn, or we see it in the guns debate, the rights of access to arms pursuant to the Second Amendment versus a right to public safety.

We saw it throughout the pandemic, rights to not wear a mask or get vaccinated versus the rights of others to feel safe and protected. So the question is what do you do then? Well, how do we address that? And it seemed to me obligations are the other side of the citizenship coin. It just can't be what the country owes us. It's got to be what we owe the country in the sense of JFK's inaugural and lots of reasons how perhaps we got to this point of a very one-sided, one-way street of citizenship, all the emphasis on what we're owed rather than what we may owe either to one another.

Let me be clear, the obligations I write about are obligations that the two of us have to one another as well as the obligations that each of us have to this country. But somewhere along the way in modern

American history, we can talk about how the sense of obligation got lost, much more of a focus on what we're entitled to rather than on what we... Oh, and that's the reason I wrote this book, to try to rebalance our approach to citizenship. So I'm not anti rights obviously, but I am pro obligations.

Again, some of these are what we owed each other, some are to the country, but somehow this has gotten lost. And it's an interesting conversation perhaps, maybe it's a digression as to how we got to this point. I have my own theories, but my own view is here we are coming up three years from now on the 250th anniversary of the declaration and the pressure is on to correct this imbalance. We're not going to have another 250 years to say the least if we don't make a lot of progress in getting a more right-sized definition of citizenship.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

I'd like to turn first to your ninth obligation, the teaching of civics, which is something that's been a really a cornerstone of act as work. And I know I slipped into the biblical calling your obligations commandments, and I also liked your evocation of the Passover service in Jewish Daily Prayer. You shall teach these things to your children and preeminently in the Passover service that every generation, we have to remember that these things are among us. It's as if we ourselves participated. And I really loved that. It struck quite a chord with me. And you're even evocation of Ronald Reagan's phrase, informed patriotism is so very powerful. I want to invite you to talk a little bit more about this idea of making it a requirement. And that of course is like herding cats when we talk about the thousands of institutions of higher ed. But I really want to get your ideas.

**Richard Haass:**

No, absolutely. No, look, let me just take one minute to circle back to what you were just saying. You got it exactly right. One of my lessons that I've drawn watching things over the last couple of years and decades is that assumptions can be dangerous things. And the assumption that somehow people came of age appreciating our history, understanding it, appreciating democracy, valuing it, understanding what it takes to make one work. The idea that somehow that's automatic, untrue. And it's so dangerous for us as a country because this is a country founded on ideas.

That's in part what sets America apart. It's not a hereditary monarchy. You get down the list of all the things. It was based upon equality of opportunity and certain rights. We haven't always lived up to him, I get it. But that's been the principle and that's been the goal. And the reason I drew the Passover analogy is Jews, for much of their thousands of years of history have been denied access to holy places, often have been living dispersed around the world and have had taken the obligation to tell their story in order to maintain their identity, to maintain their own continuity.

Don't take it for granted. It is an obligation to teach the history of one generation to the next. And I believe it's essentially the same for America, that we have that same obligation, not obligation, just to be clear and not things you have to do. They're not matters of law, they're things you should do, you ought to do either for individual or collective benefit. And when I began this, civics was a big part of it. And the more I looked into it, the more, I'll be honest with you Michael, I was stunned. We've got plus or minus 4,000 institutions of higher learning in this country. If you add up colleges, universities, community colleges, whatever, and only a handful require, let me emphasize the word require, that civics be taught. Most of them offer it in one form or another, wildly uneven, but offer it. But most schools simply have distribution requirements.

So you can graduate from 99% of the campuses in this country and if you so navigate your distribution requirements, you will not have exposure to the basic ideas or writings or anything else of American

democracy. And I just think that is a dangerous thing. We wouldn't presumably let people off campus if they were illiterate or couldn't do certain types of math or they had a certain degree of literacy when it came to operating with computers. Why would we want them to be illiterate effectively when it comes to being a citizen? So I just think this is something that must be rectified. And yes, put me in the minority. I would make it a requirement. I'm a great believer, I should say more broadly to alienate all those I haven't yet alienated that there ought to be some element of core curriculum. I think schools ought to be prepared to define what it is they think an educated individual do.

And obviously any school should leave a significant slice of the pie for individual choice. But I do think there needs to be a degree of commonality. One, because we want every graduate to know certain things, to be exposed to certain things. And two, I think it's really important for reasons of community, that students studies and read some of the same things and therefore they have those things to talk about and to debate, to disagree over. And in the process of that, again, it's a learning situation. The good news and the bad news of higher education, it's totally different. If you want to talk about, we can talk about high schools, which is a totally different challenge, but in higher education you've got a lot of latitude. We've got a lot of private colleges and universities and they can essentially decide for themselves, they've already decided either by active commission or omission what to require as a condition of graduation so they can simply change it.

Now, I am many things, naive is probably not among them. I know how difficult it can be indeed. And I hope he won't get angry at me for mentioning it. My good friend Ron Daniels whose leads Johns Hopkins University wrote a sensational book. I thought what universities democracy and Johns Hopkins has yet to introduce a required course on civics because shall we say there is pushback from certain independent entities in the campus community. Good news is next winter, Stanford is going not just to offer but to acquire every one of its incoming freshmen, I think the numbers plus or minus 1700, to take a winter module on civics. And I think that is a fantastic development. What I'm hoping is because it's done at Stanford, others will say, "Wow, if one of the best schools in this country or any country is doing this, maybe we ought to think about doing it."

And I know Stanford has resource advantages that many schools don't have. So other schools will have to think about how they would package it or approach it given their own constraints. But yes, I would love there to be something of movement in this country to require civics be taught and part of that, so one would have to overcome the resistance on campus, whether it's from faculty or students or whomever. And second of all, it begs the larger question of what's the content just, okay, we can agree in principle that civics ought to be taught. What do we mean by civics? And education in this country has clearly gotten politicized. Some might even add the word weaponized, particularly at the high school level where often there's less discretion because of kids going to public schools. So the question of the rights of parents and so forth more politicized there.

But universities, students can vote with their feet and they could either go to a school or not. And already we have a significant degree of differentiation in higher education in this country. So I would love for this to become a feature of more and more schools. And what I'm hoping is it becomes actually a magnet that parents would start to say, "Hey, I'd like to send my son or daughter to this school," or some students would. And then the challenge is obviously to make it interesting rather than [inaudible]. So I'm not naive about the hurdles here, but in the receptivity to my book, my own sense is that the time is ripe, that people know, I think people basically think American democracy is of intrinsic value and they worry that it's going off the rails to put it bluntly. So I think there's an openness to this now that perhaps there had not been.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

I totally agree. And it was very heartwarming to see the other Daniels, Mitch Daniels write a glowing review of Ron Daniels book and there we have it. Both of these splendid university leaders have emphasized the absolute importance of doing this. You raised a very interesting point in your book, which is that some of this pressure for public universities can come from the state and it would be far better to think that every board of trustees would look at the curriculum and say, "Wait a second, this is not okay. 120 semester hours to graduate and you can't find three semester hours." And they would cut through the nonsensical arguments that come sadly sometimes from faculty and administrators.

Our students already know this. They took a course in high school, which is of course absurd. Even if that were the case, are those courses college level? But putting all that aside, we've seen some states become fairly prescriptive about this. And so far the prescriptions in my mind have been good. Read the Constitution, read the Declaration of Independence, some federalist papers, some Supreme Court decisions. South Carolina says, "Read the Emancipation Act and discuss it." I'm not sure what the argument is, but we're hearing it frequently enough that this is invasive or a abrogation of academic freedom. It just strikes me as fiduciaries doing their duty.

**Richard Haass:**

Again, everything a school requires or doesn't require as a condition of graduation is a statement. So not to do it is just as much of a statement as to do it. And schools make choices all the time. There's a modern language requirement or there's not. There's a phys ed requirement or there's not. There's this degree of distribution requirements. So we think you need to do this many hours in humanities or social sciences or hard sciences or what have you. Every school makes all sorts of decisions or they make the decision not to make decisions like Brown. Or they make the decisions like certain schools to do great books and the entire curriculum is that, or the service academies make their... So we shouldn't hit ourselves. Every school is making statements and decisions about what is taught, what is offered, and what is required. So this is not an outlier.

And not to include civics, I would say is a statement. You're either saying it's one way or another. You're saying it's not a priority. You may say it's unnecessary but you're saying it's not a priority. I would disagree. And as you say, if it's 120 hours for graduation, we're talking three hours. I could do the math pretty quickly. That's about two and a half percent of the students' time. I don't think it's, shall we say exorbitant, I don't think it's going to preclude them from doing an awful lot [inaudible] either of other requirements or other things of other electives. So this to me is just a passive statement one way or another of saying it's not a priority. Look, again, I'm aware of the difficulties. Let me give you a slight excursion. I've had two experiences as a leader of peace talks in Northern Ireland.

For three years, I was the US envoy, this is about 20 years ago, dealing with certain issues with guns and other stuff. But more recently, about 10 years ago, I went back for a second tour this time not as the US Envoy, but I was invited back by the parties of Northern Ireland as an international mediator. And I was trying, one of the central issues I was dealing with was dealing with the lessons of the past and the troubles for those of you who are not focused, understandably in Rhode Island, there were three decades of the so-called troubles. Thousands of people lost their lives, Protestants, Catholics, British troops, police and so forth. And that came to an end roughly 25 years ago with the Good Friday Agreement. But right now, it still turns out that maybe 90% of the children of Northern Ireland go to single tradition schools. Integrated education in Northern Ireland doesn't mean racially integrated, it means religiously integrated or communities coming together.

So one of the things I tried to do, unsuccessfully I will point out to get ahead of it, was to promote coming to terms with the legacy of the past. There was my view that there were so many divisions that were rooted in what had happened that we needed to not necessarily legally, but deal with a lot of

issues that had come up during the three decades of the troubles. And one of the ideas I floated was to have a museum of the history of the troubles essentially and of the history of modern of Northern Ireland. And what I thought hard about was how would you do that? And this is where it gets very analogous to hear. And what I thought about was and talked to people saying, "Look, there are certain things you can't disagree with. They happen. There's certain documents, there's certain events and so forth that are central to the history."

Now, there's going to be different interpretations about motivations or fairness or whether certain things were justified or warranted. Okay. There I think the wisdom is not to impose a single set of interpretations or analyses, but to expose people to the serious ones. So here's the things that everybody needs to know, and here's where there are debates. Here's where different traditions or perspectives disagree on how to read certain events. And I think that's very analogous to American history. There are certain documents, the Constitution, the Articles of Confederation, certain writings, the Federalist Papers, maybe democracy in America, court decisions. One of the things I did in the course of reading this book was I read all the inaugural speeches of the presidents. I read farewell addresses and so forth. There's certain things I would want students to be exposed to. Then there's certain parts of American history which are obviously controversial.

They were then, they are now, okay, let's not impose a single view. I want to avoid the extremes of the 1776 and 1619 projects, but let's expose students to different schools of thought and then let's have them talk about it. Let's have classes, let's have debates, let's have simulations. Which by the way has the advantage of not only teaching students certain history, not only exposing them to different views of history, but also gets them in an interactive situation where they learn how to deal with situations where people disagree. And that's what I like so much about simulations. And so I think it's a multiple learning experience and I think that ought to be doable.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

What I'd like to do at this point invite my colleague Doug Sprei, who's been making sure that we sound okay. He is our vice president for multimedia and for campus outreach. And Doug has led a program called Campus Debate and Discourse. We've now served 6,500 students around the country watching them take up topics in parliamentary debate that very often get the adults throwing things at each other: Confederate monuments, gun control, police funding.... And these have brought out the absolute best in students. So Doug, I'm going to turn this over to you at this point.

**Doug Sprei:**

There was no plan to do this, Richard—

**Richard Haass:**

Press for it, Doug. It's all right.

**Doug Sprei:**

I guess, by way of a little background, we have a program that's exploding on all fronts. There's a huge demand for it out in the higher ed space. Because we have something that gives students an immersive experience in civil discourse. They intentionally get together to debate around the issues that are tearing the country apart, whether it's abortion or immigration, forgiving college loans. It could be almost anything that polarizes people, but we teach them to do it in a way that's respectful and civil, teaches students to speak courageously and listen openly.

And it also dovetails very closely with the educational mission of the institutions that we work with. So obviously there are institutions that are on the forefront of teaching civil discourse and civic education. You mentioned earlier in the conversation that so many are not doing that. The question is, why so much resistance to this? What's the premise of it? Who are the agents of this resistance and how do we overcome that?

**Richard Haass:**

Great question. I've asked that of myself. I've asked a lot of people, I don't have a great answer, but here's what I've come up with. For a long time there wasn't an anti-civics movement. I mean, there used to be more of it than there is now. It's faded away. The analogy I use more than any other is musical chairs. Is that when the music stops and you take a chair away, well at some point we've introduced all these other things into the curriculum, particularly in high schools and STEM and other things. And I think there's been a crowding out phenomenon a little bit instead so I think that's one part of it more than perhaps at the high school level. I think on colleges and universities, there hasn't been advocacies for it, advocacy for it. So I think there have been there's been a lot of special pleading behind other things.

And I don't mean special pleading, that's unfair, it's too negative, but you get the idea. There's been advocacy for other things on campus, not so much for this. Also, there's been a real movement in recent years against requiring anything. There's a little bit of a institution shouldn't impose students and should choose for themselves. I think that's seriously wrong. And I went to a very liberal undergraduate institution named Oberlin. I didn't know enough to make informed choices then. So I just really disagree with that. And I think schools should define themselves, but then you have to overcome faculty resistance. Faculty tends not to want to be told what to teach. And in my experience, faculty really dislikes basic courses, particularly, people want to do things that are more closely correlated with their research. Also, a lot of schools don't have, take Stanford, you can do most of what they're doing with these freshmen starting next year is going to be small group.

It's over 150 small groups. That's a lot of people. That's a lot of teaching. And where do you find it, turns out to be difficult logistically. And then I think gets a little bit at what Michael was getting, at in recent years, it's gotten more politicized what you include and what you exclude. And I think it's harder than it was to come up with a common sense or consensus about what ought to be put in, what ought to be left out. So I think there's any number of reasons. None of these ought to be dispositive. And I think what it's going to take is strong leadership from presidents of universities and probably from boards of trustees and also from parents who are basically saying, "Hey, I'm shelling out X amount of money for my son or daughter to go to school.

And this is something that I think is important." And I think one would have to be, what's the word, sensitive and mindful of potential opposition. So you'd want to design the course in ways, again, that didn't impose certain narrow interpretations of history. Avoid the extreme, avoid the end zones, let's expose them to the basics. And again, I think the debating simulation thing, I was just thinking about this morning. I was on television and we were talking about the debate about what used to be Fort Bragg and is now called Fort Liberty in North Carolina. And several of the Republican candidates one have brought back to Fort Bragg. And there wasn't a lot of sympathy for it on the set, but I was thinking to myself, just to make clear, the reason is that General Bragg was not only a bad general, but he was a Confederate general fighting against the United States of America at the time.

But I thought that'd be a really interesting classroom debate. Because you'd have one option would be, call it Camp Liberty. A second would be go back to Fort Bragg and the third would be maybe something else. Mike Barnicle had the good idea of, why don't we name it after one of the 33, I think it was Medal

of Honor wearers that came from North Carolina. Give people another choice. And I thought that would be a fantastic classroom conversation because it deals with the past, it deals with race and some of the most contentious issues in American history. And the reason I love debate, I mean, just to kind of be self-centered here for a minute, my first obligation is be informed. To be a good debater, you've got to be informed. You've got to secondly, be me involved. You've got to be open to compromise, you've got to be civil.

It's all part of civics and so forth. So there's so much you can learn by going through this process. And by the way, it teaches you also sometimes really good writing, good speaking, collaboration, teamwork. And I love debates and added things where at halftime you blow the whistle and you tell people to change sides, put yourself in the other side shoes. And you were just arguing to keep the name Fort Bragg. Now, you have to argue to change the name to Fort Liberty, make the best case you can for that. And I love that it would push students to think and to empathize with other positions. So I think there's a lot to be said. I think it helps you get around the fear of some that you would be trying to indoctrinate or impose. Let me give you one other analogy, sorry to go on so long.

New Jersey recently signed into law a requirement that students be taught information literacy. And the whole idea is in this age where we're flooded with information or what purports to be information, it's actually very hard to know what's a fact and what isn't. So the whole idea is not to teach young people what to think, it's to teach them to be critical consumers of stuff so they're better able to say, "Hey, that's a fact or what's good information hygiene? Maybe I ought to get multiple sources or maybe I ought to go to places that have editors" and so forth. And that also becomes part of modern civics. And again, I think this can all be incorporated into the classroom that it's not to impose a certain view of American history. What we're trying to do is make people be informed citizens and give them the tools so they can remain informed citizens.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

I liked your evocation of probably Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan that you do have the right to your own opinion, but not the right to your own facts. And giving students the opportunity to absorb those habits of caution about data and about anecdotes. This would be very, very valuable. And as I think of American history, getting back to putting country first, there are moments that are not well known that we really need to hold onto. When Alexander Hamilton could lobby for his arch enemy, Thomas Jefferson, how many of us, especially those of us who have been in the academy, could ever say something nice about a professor who disagreed with our publication on some obscure topic. What a marvelous moment.

**Richard Haass:**

No. One thing I would love to see is more students read Profiles and Courage written by JFK, shall we say, with the support of Ted Sorenson. And because some of the people who were lauded in the book, they're all senators. If my memory serves them right, were people who compromised at a time when the compromise was introduced a great amount of risk into your career. And other times it was people who held firm. And I love it because it allows then a conversation about when is it right to hold firm? When is it right to be open to government? What are acts of political affairs? What are modern day ones? For example, the secretaries of state in those states where they were elected officials, they were elected as Republicans supportive of the Republican Party. They were prepared to certify that the vote and the presidential election was fair and legitimate and accurate.

Talk about a profiling courage of putting country before party or person or Liz Cheney I think has done a version of it as well. And I think it's important to talk about heroes in American history who are willing to



do that. When I wrote the book, I'll be honest with you Michael, I was almost sorry I had to include this. I played around at times with what would be the 10th obligation. And I knew it had to be something of a catch-all. And I was worried that this was too obvious that to say you have to put country before party or person. Well duh, of course you do. And then I realized we have so many examples now where the opposite is having that sometimes you've got to make a case for the obvious. And that's what I thought that this had become.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

That was, I thought a brilliant, brilliant chapter. And it takes us back to the people who have been ahead of their times, the people who have been anchored in principle. I've been doing a bit of studying of John Dickinson lately. What an amazing story. A Quaker who wouldn't sign the Declaration of Independence. I should say, I went to a Quaker school because he believed that really the colony should talk this out with King George, do it the way they would in his meeting house. And when war broke out, he did something that, of course, Quakers very seldom do. He picked up a gun and he fought for the nation. And although he was a slave owner, some 40 slaves in Maryland, and it must have been a huge economic cost, he emancipated all of them and became a very, very determined abolitionist. We had some bad actors, but we also have had in our history some really quite amazing people.

When I read your book, it actually took me back to one of those texts that takes me back to doing [inaudible] at Corpus in Oxford Thucydides when he describes the revolution in Corcyra. And he says words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take on what was then given them reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally. And he goes on at some length about how twisted we can get once we abandon those basic principles, not party, but country, not me, but country. And I was just so grateful that you pulled us back to those principles so clearly in the 10 obligations.

**Richard Haass:**

No, it's also one of the reasons I'd love to see greater support for or participation in public service. I like the idea of breaking down barriers between individual Americans and their country. Military, we have the all-volunteer force, but there ought to be other forms of voluntary incentivize public service. Given our financial situation, it may be hard to do it at national level, we could certainly do it at the state level. California and other states have piloted certain programs and I think one thing colleges and universities could do is if it were done, they could start thinking when they have to make admissions decisions. I love the idea of giving a certain advantage or preference to students who say have spent one or two years in a gap situation doing public service. And I think it's also good because I want to incentivize them to do it with pay and things like job hiring or preferential admissions.

But I think it's another way of bringing Americans together. I worry now that the American experience has become so separate, we're so siloed because of geography, class, educational attainment, religion, what cable station you watch, what have you that I think, again, it's bad for the fabric of our so society. There's less and less of a sense of common good of being part of something larger because increasingly we're in such separate, again, existences, politically, socially, culturally, what have you. And I hear again, I think there's a place potentially for those in the university world to incentivize it and to make it more likely to happen.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

That call for national service really did resonate with me. And I suppose there are a number of different ways that this could gain some traction. If for example, Pell Grant, loans so forth, access to them were to some degree tied to that kind of service, it would be splendid plus other incentives for those who are so

well healed that wouldn't be so much of an issue. I recall a conversation with a very high level mathematician from Switzerland who had extolled the experience of being in a barracks during for the required national service in Switzerland. And what he said he'd clearly come out of a very elite background was that I never would've met this part of Swiss society otherwise. What an extraordinary way to really integrate our society.

**Richard Haass:**

And so everybody, the greatest generation type thing. And I looked at it hard and talked to a lot of people and I just came to the conclusion that anything that was mandatory would receive all sorts of pushback from left and right alike. The issue would become, the idea of service would get lost and the debate over whether it ought to be mandated. So I put the mandate aside and just said, "Let's incentivize it." You mentioned loan forgiveness. That's one way. There could be a training dimension afterwards, a hiring dimension, an admissions dimension. There's lots of ways I think we could incentivize it and make participation fairly popular. And again, it's something that I think we ought to look at seriously. And by the way, I think there might be bipartisan support for it. Indeed, I'd say that about civics too. I haven't encountered, if you will, narrow political support from people who are affiliated with one party and opposition from the other.

Again, obviously there's a issue about content, but I think there's both resistance in both parties but also openness in both parties. I would love to see more programs pop up almost as experiments. Brandeis notion of the states as laboratories and democracy. Well, I like the idea of universities and colleges also becoming laboratories of educational innovation here. And they could introduce a civics course and require it and see what happens, give it some running room, give it a couple of years, then do an assessment and so forth. But I think that would be something worthwhile.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

Richard, I'm enormously grateful both for the book and for your taking time to talk with us. Do you have other ideas that we haven't covered that we should share with our Higher Ed Now listeners? We will turn ourselves back with even greater energy to doing what we can to make sure that colleges and universities understand their obligation to require real mastery of the building blocks of the American experience and American government. Right now, I think we're hovering around 19% of the four year liberal arts colleges and universities that we survey that require such a course. And clearly that's not adequate. That is an exposure for the future of the nation. And the more we can bring people to the understanding that this is not a casual issue, that it's something that has to be done, the better this nation will be. But I want to turn this back to you at this point.

**Richard Haass:**

First of all, thank you for what you and Doug and your colleagues do. Look for those, and I'm sensitive to the resource side of this, when I spoke to the president of a large state school, he said, "Hey, we're not Stanford." So two other ideas. One is for those particularly that are on three or four semesters, it doesn't have to even be half, even a quarter course or trimester course as a possibility. Another idea is freshman year experience to put this at the heart of that and say, "Okay, we have you there for a week." What better thing than to have the incoming freshmen read some things.

It could either be a book or several books or even excerpts from several things and then have conversations about that have structured conversations. Again, they'd get a little bit of civics and it'd be a great way to get to know one another and then hopefully it would also wet the appetite for some of them to take more in the course of their years on campus. So I think there's lots of ways to go about this

if schools were unable, at least initially, or unwilling to take the leap into a full bore required course. I think there's some lesser approaches that would still have some value.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

I agree. Although, one of the things that we do keep track of informally is the array of the bizarre and nugatory courses that are offered as electives and there is a certain impulse to put in front of boards of trustees the question, "Do you know what is happening on your campus in lieu of the use of that very valuable faculty time for things that are essential?" And I guess, ACTA might be doing even a little bit more of that, not to be lacerative, but simply to recognize that the opportunity cost of doing the trivial and the nugatory is really quite great.

**Richard Haass:**

No, good for you. And my guess is that most boards of trustees either are not aware of it or if they're aware of it, they're not focused on it. They haven't really asked themselves the question and most schools don't. What do we consider to be, what do we define as an educated young person? What do we want to make sure? I believe that anyone associated with any college university ought to ask himself or her the question, "What do we think every student has to know or have, whether it's knowledge or skills, what do they need to know? What do they have? What do they need to have?" That's a pretty central, it's almost, it gets very close to what's their mission. Well, and to say, "Well, our mission is to educate," that's fine, but that's not good enough. What do we mean by educated? Here they are in a third decade of the of this century.

What do we think that means, particularly in this country? What are the requirements of that? Now, we can talk about how we actually deliver that, but I think any institution regularly ought to have this conversation. And again, my own bias is towards a core curriculum or at least far fewer, if you have a menu of choice, don't have 86 items on the menu, have a much smaller number of items on the menu, things like that. I think there's ways schools can get to where I think all of us would like them to get. But it begins with this conversation and with having a really heartfelt conversation about what we considered, what do we want to make sure we accomplish with every young person who leaves?

What should everyone who's thinking of hiring them know for sure that they bring with themselves? What's the skillset? What's the knowledge set and so forth. So I think that would be a healthy conversation for people in positions of responsibility, whether it's administration or boards of trustees and the like to have, I think they've got to have it first. Then they have to think about how to win over students and faculty. I get it. But I think it starts with those who have the obligation to lead these institutions.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

And what a great opportunity for a faculty to come together and to say, "What's really crucial, what are the priorities? When we look at all those people wearing funny clothes that commencement, what makes us feel that every student who receives a diploma is to the best of our ability prepared for not just career, but prepared for citizenship?" Well, thank you. This has been an absolutely extraordinary conversation for which I'm enormously grateful. I hope our path since I didn't actually cross at Oxford, will at some point cross on these shores. And thank you for sharing this message with Higher Ed Now.

**Richard Haass:**

Well thanks to you and Doug. And the reason our paths probably didn't cross at Oxford is you were most likely in the library, I was in a pub and I think that would probably explain it more than anything else.

**Michael Poliakoff:**

Well, Corpus was notorious for driving its students really hard. I'm glad for that in retrospect, I did enjoy the pubs, not infrequently. Well, I do hope we'll meet at some point. Thank you again.

**Richard Haass:**

Look forward to it. Thank you, sir.