

Michael Poliakoff ([00:11](#)):

Welcome to Higher Ed Now. I'm Michael Poliakoff, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and our guest today is a distinguished attorney, distinguished professor of law, and perhaps more than anything else, a devoted citizen of his community. Lee Strang served as the John W. Stapler Professor of Law and Values at the University of Toledo College of Law. He is now the inaugural director of the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at the Ohio State University and a professor at the Moritz College of Law. He's a distinguished scholar, the author of *Originalism's Promise*, a natural law account of the American Constitution, which Cambridge University Press published in 2019.

([01:05](#)):

And he's the co-editor of five volumes of Federal Constitutional Law. He is the founder and school board president of Northwest Ohio Classical Academy and shares his knowledge, consults with other groups that want to consider starting a classical school. He holds a JD from University of Iowa and a master of laws from Harvard Law School. I don't think I'll embarrass you, Lee, by saying that you also have eight children.

Lee Strang ([01:37](#)):

I welcome that.

Michael Poliakoff ([01:38](#)):

Which is a great contribution to the future and it makes me enormously grateful that you could spare some time for this podcast.

Lee Strang ([01:47](#)):

Thank you, Michael.

Michael Poliakoff ([01:48](#)):

I want to start by asking you about the Chase Center, which you now lead as the inaugural director. How are things going? I noticed that you will be offering courses this fall.

Lee Strang ([02:00](#)):

That's right.

Michael Poliakoff ([02:01](#)):

With a sequence then to minors and to majors. So let me turn it over to you.

Lee Strang ([02:06](#)):

Thank you, Michael. So as you know, the Salmon P. Chase Center was started in 2023 by the state of Ohio. I started in August of 2024, so there was a period of lag between when the center was created and when I was found as the initial leader of it. And so I view last year as really our first year. Last year was a year of foundation, is the way that I think of it where we're setting... This is the lawyer setting precedents, right? How will we be as an academic community, how will we act? How will we teach our students? How will we engage with colleagues across the campus and elsewhere? What kind of public programming will we offer? I'm happy to report that the first year went really well. So we came out of last year with approximately 21 faculty that will be starting this fall.

([02:45](#)):

We have faculty from all different disciplines. So one of the aspects of citizenship education that we're engaged in is partnering with the existing disciplines both in the departments that house them, but also faculty from those different disciplines. And so we hired folks from history, we hired folks from law, we hired folks from sociology. So all the bodies of knowledge that provide knowledge that's relevant to young people becoming great Buckeyes and great American citizens. So the hiring went really well, Michael. We did our first public programming this last year and I viewed the public programming as a concrete way to share with folks in the OSU community and then outside and the entire Ohio State concrete examples of how the Chase Center will live out its mission of citizenship education. And our first event, which folks can find the recording online was a conversation between our own president, Ted Carter and President Ron Daniels of Johns Hopkins University.

(03:38):

And it was a conversation about what's the role of citizenship education in a major public research university. Because in my conversations with colleagues across the campus, it wasn't obvious to them that there was a role, and in fact some people thought and not implausibly thought that there might be a tension between citizenship education as offered by the Chase Center and the research mission of OSU to find, to curate, and to transmit knowledge. And it was a wonderful conversation that I think both in practice and then in the substance of what both speakers provided showed the compatibility, in fact the necessary compatibility of both the citizenship arm and then the research arm.

(04:15):

And then what we've been doing, we've preparing to offer our first classes this fall. The first classes are two versions of a course called the American Civic Tradition, which introduced students to core aspects of the things that we Americans hold in common. We have our student program, which we call the Chase Society Scholars Program. It's launching this fall as well. And I'm happy to report that we have almost a hundred students signed up already to be Chase society members and we have a great lineup of public programming, if folks can go to our website. I actually had somebody come up to me, I was at a meeting in the university earlier saying, wow, I just saw the things you guys are doing this next academic year. It's great. So I would say things are going really well.

Michael Poliakoff (04:50):

When I worked at NEH under the chairmanship of the late Bruce Cole, who was really quite wonderful, one of the things that I remember him saying with such joy, that you can find the biography of John Adams that David Bacala wrote in airport bookstores. And he said, universities need to take note that the American public is hungry for its history. And when you said, which was wonderful to hear that a hundred students have already signed on, it reminded me that there is a great hunger and all of the feelings that we have sometimes of despair. Does the younger generation really understand the American story? Really evaporate when we see how they want the kinds of programs typified by what you're offering. And of course, I think you and I are both admirers of Senator Jerry Serino for finding the funding for five of these all across Ohio. I get the impression you have been a very active member of that consortium sharing ideas. Can you talk a little bit about the comprehensiveness of this initiative?

Lee Strang (06:07):

Yeah, so on your point about McCulloch and John Adams, so one of the courses that we're going to offer this spring, so we're going through the curriculum process offer. This is a course called the Great American Novel. And the Great American Novel is a course that simply identifies in the faculty member's judgment what are the great novels that typify the American civic tradition. And it's going to be wonderful. The students are going to be really attracted to it, but it's exactly as you were saying, Michael, I think this is a real time, at least I'll say in my professional life, is the time I'm most optimistic about higher education providing not just the knowledge and research that universities do really well in the

United States, but providing the ability of us to curate well-rounded citizens. And Ohio doesn't just have the Chase Center as you were mentioning, right? At Ohio State.

(06:48):

What we have is through the good offices of our legislative partners, especially Senator Sereno, we have five centers with almost identical missions. I'll characterize them as citizenship education at five of the leading public universities in Ohio. And what that does is one thing that's obvious is it spreads the ability to provide this citizenship education not just to the group of students who come to OSU, large though that number may be, but to many of the other universities all throughout the state, geographically and socioeconomically as well. But even more Michael, what we've learned because the different centers are working together in our planning to launch not just our classes. So we have conversations about what classes we're going to offer inside our universities, but also what are we going to do for the state, especially in the K-through-12 spot. So as you might imagine, I'm sure you're aware, the lack of civic knowledge among other things didn't just start when people turned 18 and come to university.

(07:38):

It started way back in the K-through-12 space. And so the Toledo Center, for example, has already started offering K-through-12 teacher training in primary texts in the American Civic tradition and actually talked with some of the teachers who attended their session. One of them even said it was the best professional development experience that this teacher had ever had in his life. And that person's like an older person who's done a lot of professional development. So the centers together are going to coordinate not just the substance, but also the delivery of this value of citizenship education throughout the entire state. And one more innovation I'll share that is going to make the cooperation among the different civic even more effective is that Ohio just created the Ohio Civics Board.

(08:19):

The Ohio Civics Board is a board of the five civic center directors, and their mission is to advance citizenship education in the universities in K-through-12 and throughout the entire state of Ohio. So now we have a real vehicle for us to work together in a formal manner, in a way that we've already been doing informally. So Ohio, there's no gain saying all to the good work that our friends are doing in other states around the country, but Ohio's doing some really good work right now.

Michael Poliakoff (08:44):

It really is wonderful to see this comprehensiveness, this vision for reinvigorating the understanding of the American story right across the whole state. And of course, we should talk a little bit about Senate bill one, and it's really nicely structured set of requirements for every student, every undergraduate in public universities. But I first wanted to go back to what you had said about the course on the American novel, and I was reminded when I looked at your website that one of your minor tracks I think it was, is around the great books.

(09:23):

There's something really, really wonderful about a civic center that recognizes that the understanding of our cultural heritage is a part of the American story that we must not lose, and it also really helps students to see the excitement of this. I think we've all heard the grumbling about civic education, eyes rolling or shutting, especially in the junior high school and high school classes, which is so, so demoralizing to hear because it's an exciting story. I wanted to ask you before we go on to the American History and Government requirement in Senate bill one to talk a little bit about the comprehensiveness that you have in your vision for the Salmon Chase Center.

Lee Strang (10:16):

Yeah, Michael, you're exactly right. So we plan over the next two and a half years now to build out three majors and then some minors as well. So our first major is going to be Civics Law and Leadership, which is focused on citizenship education, what we've been talking about before, but very close to that and complementary is the Great Books program that we're going to offer as a major as well. OSU has 45,000 undergraduate students. We don't have a great books program. And so I think there's a real market for that. So that's one of the reasons why we're entering into that space. And in particular, Michael, what I'm finding when I talk with parents and students from around Ohio, you had mentioned my experience in the classical education world, and so I feel like I have my pulse on at least a significant subset of Ohio parents and students.

(10:59):

And in fact, what we're going to be hosting tomorrow actually is the first Ohio Classical Schools conference where we're bringing together all the classical schools, public, private, religious, non-religious to meet for the first time, to share fellowship, to collaborate, and then including collaborating with university partners with the centers, both in the K through 12 teacher space, but also when I talked with many parents, the parents will say, my son or daughter might want to go to OSU, but they don't see the degree program, the academic program that would be of interest given their classical background. And so great books is right up their alley and their parents' eyes, they light up when I say that We will be offering a great books degree for your students. So if the young people will get this great education, they'll get literature, they'll get history, they'll get politics, they'll get theology and religion.

(11:44):

And so the problem we talked about earlier about people coming to us at age 18 lacking much of the formation to be flourishing American citizens, we're able to partner with schools that are starting in the kindergarten era and we're actually going to be able to expand that all the way through university level. So the Great Books program, we think of it as adjacent and complementary to our civics law and leadership degree, and then the last degree that we're going to plan to offer, Michael, is actually a degree in classical education, a BA for young people who want to go teach in the burgeoning classical schools movement around the country. Classical education is the largest growing segment of K through 12 education in the US. It's naturally aligned with citizenship education on the university level. Students will want to come to us. Many of our students want to go back and give back by being teachers in their K through 12 schools. And so I just see this as a wonderful virtuous cycle.

Michael Poliakkoff (12:33):

Virtuous indeed. And if I understand correctly, the Northwest Classical Charter School is part or at least affiliated with the Barney Charter School movement, so it's part of something that really is reinvigorating K-12 education throughout the country.

Lee Strang (12:50):

That's right. So for folks who aren't aware of it, the Barney Charter School Initiative is out of Hillsdale College. It's been a leader in providing classical education curriculum and then also other advice and service to help. In Ohio, we call our charter schools community schools because it literally is people in a community see an educational need. They come together and they start a school. That's actually where Northwest Ohio Classical Academy came from. And so the curriculum at Hillsdale developed that they share with schools like Northwest Ohio Classical and the other classical schools in Ohio. It's an extraordinarily excellent curriculum, and we want to partner with those schools to help their children continue their education, and then some of them will come and be teachers and actually maybe about three and a half, four years out, we want to offer a classical school administration degree for school leaders of those schools. So we're hoping to really help them flourish even more.

Michael Poliakoff ([13:39](#)):

This is really wonderful. I think back to an article I read years ago in the American Federation of Teachers Journal, and right on the cover was in bold letters, no more Mickey Mouse Professional Development. And what you're doing is treating teachers as the professionals that they are.

Lee Strang ([14:03](#)):

100%.

Michael Poliakoff ([14:03](#)):

No more playing around with gummies and milk cartons and then calling that professional development. You're giving them what they really want. You're giving them the things that cause them to go into the profession and really empowers them to bring this to the students.

Lee Strang ([14:21](#)):

We talked just before about we'll be equipping students to go on to be teachers with a BA in classical education, but one of the things that we had mentioned earlier was that Toledo's already servicing existing K through 12 school teachers, and we at the Chase Center plan to start doing that in the summer of 26. And the experience that Toledo had, the experience that I'm hearing from teachers is that many of them haven't had a chance either in their formal education that they had or in their subsequent professional development to actually get into the substance of what they want to teach their students.

([14:51](#)):

And so many of them haven't had a chance to delve into the background, to the meaning, to the implementation of the Declaration of Independence. And we're going to provide that not just in the teaching that we're going to offer to the students with our faculty, but actually in model curricula that they can then take back with accompanying documents and books that they can use and with video presentations from our faculty that they can also use. We're trying to be partners with the K through 12 space and the teachers and treat them like peers, like colleagues in this educational opportunity.

Michael Poliakoff ([15:22](#)):

I think there will be a lot of envy among the older generation that they never had such an opportunity, but it's a gift to give to the rising generation. Let's turn to Senate bill one and the requirement for a relatively prescriptive American history and government requirement. I think we should characterize it as not in any way a ceiling, but certainly a very secure foundation. And you'll be no doubt developing courses that will really build on that foundation. Tell me a little bit what you have in mind.

Lee Strang ([16:01](#)):

So stepping back, Ohio passed a large bill just this past spring. Colloquially is known as Senate bill one has many provisions in it aimed at educational reform. For our audience, it's controversial. Many people view it as controversial. One key aspect that you're referencing, Michael, is that every graduate of a public university in Ohio has to have a class that meets certain criteria about what I call the American civic tradition or what we call the American civic tradition, including some particular documents like the Declaration. Now, some of our people in our audience might say, well, why is that necessary? And for a variety of reasons, we can go into higher ed has moved in a place where it has become necessary to offer a course, at least one course that all students will take to help them understand some of the foundational aspects of their civic tradition.

([16:48](#)):

And the documents include the Declaration of Independence. So we've developed three courses, Michael, you may say Y3. One reason is actually we're testing how the different courses work. So one of the courses that we're offering is called the American Civic Tradition: Creeds, Conflict, and Cooperation. And what it does is it starts with the Declaration of Independence. It starts with the claims that the declaration makes about the American political community. That we are created equal, that we were created, that we have natural rights, that government is authorized by consent of the governed and then looks at the origin of those claims, evaluates the claims on their own merits, looks at how those claims have been received or not received as the case may be at different points in American history. So the theme is the declaration's claims through American history, and then we use that to engage the other documents like the Constitution.

(17:37):

So the Constitution among other things is meant to practically implement and make concrete the declaration's claims. Does it do well? How does it do so? So that's one of the three classes that we're offering and we're excited to offer that because we view that, Michael, as intrinsically valuable helping students for the first time. Most of the students have not read the Constitution. So helping them to read the Constitution, but then also introducing them to the Chase Center and the academic community that we're creating of people of all different backgrounds and viewpoints who care about reading and debating these kind of documents and these kind of texts. So we're really excited to offer them this fall.

Michael Poliakoff (18:11):

I noticed your other course is subtitled American Civic Tradition Then and Now, and that seems to capture one of the other really, really important aspects of these new civic centers in Ohio and elsewhere, which is intellectual exchange, debate, which is of course part of the DNA of our country. We have Federalists, we have Anti-Federalists. It is baked into our heritage. I'd like to get from you a little bit more sense of what you envision in that course.

Lee Strang (18:47):

Yeah, as we mentioned, there are three versions of this course, the American Civic Tradition, and all of them are aimed at helping students have a foundational knowledge of our tradition, the things that we hold in common that are good, and the American Civic tradition that in now that course uses the lens of de Tocqueville's Democracy in America. So such an amazing book. For those who haven't read it, the Tocqueville's writing about the 1830s in the United States, and he's making claims about the United States that for those who read it today or recently, they're very prescient. You're like, I can see America today in what he's saying about America almost two centuries ago.

(19:20):

So it's just an extraordinary work and it's also extraordinary for another reason, Michael. So there are historical claims that Tocqueville makes. There are legal claims, legal propositions, sociological propositions. So from our perspective as a multidisciplinary academic community and who have sociologists and historians and lawyers and English professors, having a text that is the lens through which a course is taught, that has relevance to all of those disciplines is also an incredible opportunity for our students to take that course from a sociologist or from a lawyer.

(19:50):

It'll be similar but also different. So that'll be part of the enrichment of our course. And as you said, Tocqueville had a number of claims about America, many very positive, some constructively critical. And so our students get to see a picture of America at an earlier point in time, positive and negative, authentic, evaluate that has America improved? Is it the same country? Is it a better country? Is it the worst country? So all those kinds of questions will be sources of debate and conversation and as you said that were going



on back then Age of Jackson, going on today and will continue as long as America exists. I think of that course as really being a microcosm of what the Chase Center offers to young people.

Michael Poliakoff ([20:27](#)):

I've been doing exactly that of rereading Tocqueville and reading at the same time, obviously a shorter book, Bernard Henri Levy's American Vertigo in which with the backing of the Atlantic, he rather retraced... Well, went much farther than Tocqueville did, but in the steps of Tocqueville, and this was early in the 21st century, asking myself what would Tocqueville have said and what of his predictions? His real agonizing, for example, about the power of the executive branch, to what extent have those come true? Wonderful stuff for the classroom.

Lee Strang ([21:11](#)):

You had mentioned one of the aspects, so we're focusing on Tocqueville, but one of the characteristics of our curriculum is going to be focused on primary text supplemented by secondary sources. So you mentioned a great secondary source. So that way our students are introduced to the actual authentic best of the American tradition in the text and debates and documents that format, but also reflecting on the current conversations. So one example is we're going to be offering a course in the spring. Titles still to be determined, but it's something like the role of religion in the American civic tradition, which has lots of variables, lots of characteristics, lots of positives, lots of challenges as well. But our students will be engaging not just with the primary texts of that tradition, but also with contemporary commentators in higher ed. So it's going to be in addition to the curricular offerings.

Michael Poliakoff ([21:56](#)):

I fear that I skipped a step in not asking you about the very name of the center. On your website, you have really a beautiful homage to Salmon Chase, the way the center is going to capture his vision and virtues. Please talk a little bit about that, Lee.

Lee Strang ([22:15](#)):

You give me a chance to really an anecdote. So I was invited to apply to join the Chase Center. As you mentioned my wife and I, we have a number of kids. We've been married for a long time. And so I said a lot of Americans don't know who Salmon Chase is, but he's actually this extraordinary mid-nineteenth century Ohioan. In the world that I operate in legal philosophy and jurisprudence, one of the tools is to talk about something being the central case or the focal case, like the best example of something. And so it allows you to differentiate shades of healthiness from a healthy oak tree, which is like green with lots of acorns to an unhealthy one, which is shriveled and small. And the same thing occurs in my mind regarding citizenship. So it's not that we have typically zero citizenship or 100% citizenship.

([22:55](#)):

There's a range. There's degrees of people living out their citizenship. So Chase, for those who don't know, he was a lawyer. He was the most prominent pro-freedom lawyer in the Antebellum era. He brought a number of the leading cases. He developed innovative arguments, some of which were successful, some of which were not successful. He started Lyceum, he started newspapers, he edited newspapers. He was the starter of the free soil party. He was a founder of the Republican Party. He was a local government official, US senator from Ohio. He was the governor of Ohio. Most people know him because he was Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury. Chase Bank is named after him. And then ultimately, which was the passion of his life, actually the passion was to be president. So he was not president, but he was chief justice of the United States. From which perch, he issued a number of crucial decisions that are still cited and talked about today. So he lived American civic life to the fullest. So he's not just a fancy name, he's our model as well.

Michael Poliakoff ([23:54](#)):

Many of your students absorb that inspiration and follow through with it. I was thinking about the book of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*, which has some beautiful cameos of the members of the cabinet. And of course it reflects so well on Lincoln. Rather than fearing dissent, he embraced it so that there would be a heterodoxy of opinions. In the enabling legislation as I remember, there was in fact a real emphasis on intellectual diversity. And it sounds to me as if you are really baking that into the very courses in minors and majors and certificates that you have.

Lee Strang ([24:44](#)):

You're exactly right. Our core mission is to provide citizenship education to Ohio State undergraduates and then ultimately graduate students and Ohioans more generally, which we're moving in all those different fronts. Another aspect of our mission is the mission of all the centers is to enhance our universities intellectual diversity. And I see us doing that in a lot of ways. So one way is that we're, as I mentioned earlier, a multidisciplinary academic community. My background is law, and so the folks in the law school, they're lawyers and that's entirely appropriate. But what we're trying to do is provide citizenship education. There's not existing discipline that is the only relevant body of knowledge for that project. We need lawyers, but we also need historians and folks from the classics and folks in English. And so we're to our core and intellectually diverse academic community, and we also enhance our broader universities intellectual diversity.

([25:36](#)):

Part of it's to the classes we offer. So we're not bound by this, but our commitment is that we are not going to offer classes that duplicate existing course offerings. So if there's something good going on, let's keep doing it, right? We're trying to enhance the curriculum. So I mentioned earlier the *Great American Novel* book. It just seems to be the case that every American should come out of university education, having a taste of the literature that is uniquely American literature, the *Great American Novel*. We're enhancing the curriculum at OSU in that way. And then many other ways as well as we mentioned, right? So religion in American life, there's lots of intellectual diversity that we're offering. Our faculty that we're bringing in are typically asking questions that maybe aren't being asked or are investigating potential answers that maybe are not currently being investigated. So one of the faculty members that we're bringing in is an English scholar named Michael Clune, and Michael is a great English literature scholar in his own right.

([26:30](#)):

He also is writing about the place of the discipline of English in higher ed. He's been doing it in the *Chronicle of Higher Ed*, so public intellectual, but also for those who are interested. His Chicago Press book called *Judgment* and that he's been making in his scholarly work, which is then made public in the *Chronicle* work, is that the disciplines do have particular expertises that they offer. So there is an aesthetic judgment that can be honed through people in English or people in law, for example, and that that's something that we can offer students that's distinctive and valuable. But then his claim is that as a matter of sociology, most departments have moved away from offering a distinct value in terms of offering a distinct expertise. And his argument is to move back there. And so Michael's joining us and he's bringing that perspective both in his discipline of English, but also with citizenship education for the Chase Center. So there's just many ways in which we're enriching the existing diversity at OSU and then throughout higher ed.

Michael Poliakoff ([27:31](#)):

It's wonderful, rather groundbreaking to think that once again, students will have signature courses that they'll remember all their lives. It's something that most schools have moved away from. It used to be that there would be a certain body of courses that everyone would have and it would unite the generations as



the signature of the school and the Chase Center is beginning to develop those sorts of experiences for students.

Lee Strang ([28:05](#)):

You're exactly right, Michael. A concrete thing about the Chase Center and then broaden a little bit. So we have a set of introductory courses that all our students are going to take. One is the American Civic Tradition, which we were talking about different versions of that course where all of our students will have read the declaration and read about its claims and then read about those roles in American civic life up to today. We're also going to have a second introductory course, which has the rhetorical question, can we rule ourselves? Thinking about what it is we are as America or as a state here in Ohio, we are a self-governing political community. That historically is unusual. How has that experiment been able to succeed? What can allow that experiment to continue to succeed and even thrive over the long term? That's the question that course is going to ask and provide different answers throughout the Western tradition that have been given to give students an opportunity to develop their own answer to that question.

([28:58](#)):

And then on the flip side, Michael, when our students graduate from our major, which we'll be able to offer starting in the fall of 26, our major of civics law and leadership, they're going to do a bachelor's thesis. So bachelor's theses used to be relatively common back in the day. They're almost extinct now. But our students are going to write a substantial piece of work on the subject of citizenship. And there's lots of different ways that that can be discussed. It could be literature, it could be law and everything in between. And then they're going to defend that thesis to our faculty. They're going to have an almost unique experience in higher ed. And after they've been through that, Michael, as you're suggesting, they're never going to forget that, right? It's hopefully going to be one of the most professionally challenging, but also professionally enriching experiences that will then carry with them throughout their life.

([29:40](#)):

And just to broaden a little bit, the experience that you were describing, right? Of these courses and these subjects and these books that people had read that they care with them throughout their life, that was a common experience. For a variety of reasons, that's not a common experience anymore. And I think it's not a coincidence that the humanities generally have suffered because of it, because students, young people aren't being offered the kind of experiences that are worth the opportunity costs and time that they're investing in higher ed. And so the Chase Center is really, I think, one of the most bright and other civic centers around Ohio and around the country, one of the most bright lights in helping revive the fortunes of the humanities because we're offering something distinctive from humanities perspective. Going back to Michael Clune's arguments that maybe has been not as prominently displayed over the recent past.

Michael Poliakoff ([30:24](#)):

Reviving the humanities, giving them purpose, that is indeed a wonderful goal. It sounds to me as if you've done something that is really wonderful for the university as a whole. You've brought the other department's inspiration into the experience, and thus you are standing to the side of the university. You've become an integral part of it. You referenced that earlier. Could you talk a little bit more about the way the Salmon Chase Center is interacting with the rest of the university?

Lee Strang ([31:01](#)):

Great question, Michael, and thank you for asking it. So one of our goals is to be a partner with other disciplines, the other departments, the other colleges. They all have something from the perspective of citizenship education that's valuable to our students. We are partnering with them as we build out. So this

is the current version. It's going to build out to be more robust over time. So one thing that we're doing is working with other departments when it comes to offering our public programming. The conversation with President Carter and President Daniels was co-sponsored by a number of other colleges and departments that are in a similar space here at OSU. One of our faculty members is going to be teaching this fall in OSU's PPE program, the philosophy, politics and economics program. They had a need, they needed some additional folks to teach. We had a faculty member who was ready, willing and able to teach in that area.

(31:46):

And so I view that as just another win-win situation. We have a faculty fellows program where we invite existing OSU faculty to become faculty fellows in the Chase Center. I'll give you one example I'm really excited about. A scholar of K-through-12 education for the last 20 years in the Glenn College, which is the College of Public Affairs here at OSU, is going to be a faculty fellow for the next couple of years at the Chase Center because this scholar who's been doing some of the leading empirical research on the efficacy or lack thereof of different models of K-through-12 education is going to do some of the first empirical research on classical education in the United States. Is it working? What's working well? What's not working well? And one of the challenges then, just is that a lot of folks in the classical space tend to be suspicious of people who are from the higher ed space wanting to do research on them.

(32:38):

I think that they are suspicious of the motives, of the goals, wondering whether the data will be painted in an intentionally negative light. But we're able, because of our relationships to say, this is somebody who's genuinely pursuing the truth and wants to help you by your own light, see what's working well or what's not working well, so that way you can offer the best product to your students. As we build out our curriculum, as we build out our minor and our major, we'll have courses from existing departments that we cross-list in our major and courses that we cross-list in other majors as well. So our goal is to be a mechanism of enrichment to OSU, one that enriches other departments, but is also in turn enriched by the faculty and scholarship and people of other departments.

Michael Poliakoff (33:20):

What a gift to the people of Ohio and to the people of the whole nation. What I hope from the position of ACTA is that when we look ahead, maybe a decade or so, that states will begin to compete in a healthy way. Well, why don't we have programs like this? Then we've done something of lasting importance for the nation. We've built the momentum to go back to the understanding of the American story, of the training, of the production of citizens who understand their heritage and the role that they have to have in the future. So we're all enormously grateful to you, Lee, for what you're doing. Lee, could you talk as a very, very successful inaugural director about the nuts and bolts and for other directors or others who may be thinking about starting such centers, what are the pathways that seem to be working well and what are the things that are on your mind that might even be keeping you awake a little bit at night?

Lee Strang (34:41):

It's a great question. It's an earnest question, right? Just stepping back a little bit that I think provides some context. The Chase Center, the other centers in Ohio, the other schools of civic thought around the country that have been started since 2016, they are holding two commitments simultaneously. On the one hand, and I know the folks who are leading these centers and the faculty at these centers, they think that higher ed is incredibly valuable to the United States, past, present, and future for many reasons, for the knowledge it produces, for the formation of young people, both as individuals and as citizens. That's one commitment. But I think they also recognize that there are aspects of higher ed that could be better versions than it currently is, and it's that latter part that causes at least some people internal to some universities, some discomfort. One of the challenges that I've seen has not been resistant to the Chase

Center's mission, but by and large, when I share the mission of citizenship education, how the existing disciplinary bodies of knowledge are valuable and in fact essential components of that, people say, yes, that's a great mission.

(35:42):

They see the need for it too, Michael. They see that we have young people who had never read the Constitution, which isn't very long. It's not like the EU constitution, which was like 200 pages, and they also have a hard time talking with each other. So Americans are siloed in so many ways. We silo where we live, who our friends are, who we marry, et cetera. And so I think people, all different backgrounds see that there are real challenges facing the United States, especially in the formation of young people. So the mission has not been an obstacle in my experience to most people. What has been an obstacle is that many people perceive the mission as being a rhetorical gloss and something else, something nefarious. So what I've seen, a large part of my job during my first year and continuing of course, is showing what I call the proof is in the pudding. That we've got this mission, we're authentically trying to live up to it.

(36:30):

And what you'll see in practice is that in the programming we provide, in the scholars we hire, in the classes that we offer, these are faithful implementations of that mission. In my experience, when people see that, it starts off with the public facing programming, that's the easiest to start up. It's kind of an easy way to display your bonafides, so to speak. And our faculty are excellent scholars. They're scholars who meet and exceed the existing OSU standards in terms of their publications, in terms of the schools they're from, Oxford and Stanford, all the excellent universities around the world that people are able to say, okay, there was a promise of a mission that's attractive, and now it's being implemented in a way that people of all backgrounds view as being true. So I think the first part of setting up one of these schools of civic thought is a perception of a disjunction between the mission and the way things actually be implemented.

(37:20):

We've tried to be very transparent in doing that in a way that lives up. Now, we're not winning over everybody. Michael, just being totally frank, I think it's probably the case, there's five or 10% of people in the OSU community that we'll probably never win over, and that's fine. As you mentioned earlier, Americans have been arguing since the beginning, so it's not surprising that we'll be arguing over something as important as higher ed reform today. That's probably the biggest challenge is showing people that the good faith, at least of us, and I know for sure of the other leaders, of the other schools of civic thought, in trying to implement that. That has built relationships over time.

Michael Poliakoff (37:54):

I've been looking recently at Stephen Smith's wonderful book on patriotism. He's very clear about the fact that there are those who simply dismiss it, brush it off as something that's a recidivist approach to the country, and that's what makes that book so very important that he really is delving into the important but beneficial aspects of patriotism.

(38:23):

And I think of the work that you're doing here, and some of it is, dare I say, missionary work to make sure that the American civic story is one that does not ignore the things that we have done wrong as a nation, the warts, the blemishes, the stains, but also puts that into the whole of that progress towards the more perfect union as we approach our 250th.

(38:54):

With that, Lee, I just want to thank you for taking time. As I said at the beginning, it's really amazing the prodigious amount that you have been producing, the books, the articles, raising a family, volunteer work. You've been so generous to your community, and thank you for being with us on Higher Ed Now so that

others can listen to this podcast and benefit from the experiences you've had as a founder of an important new civic center.

Lee Strang ([39:26](#)):

Thank you, Michael, and thank you for all the good offices of ACTA. You guys have been such great partners and thinking through how to revive citizenship education in the US.

Michael Poliakoff ([39:34](#)):

It's something that is so very fulfilling for us as we approach our 30th anniversary.

Lee Strang ([39:41](#)):

Right, congratulations.

Michael Poliakoff ([39:42](#)):

We are making a real contribution to the revival of the Spirit of America. Thank you, Lee.

Lee Strang ([39:50](#)):

See you, Michael.

Doug Spry ([40:09](#)):

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