

NCA Goes to Kettering Workshop

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Dubbed by some as the "Deliberative Democracy Movement," citizens across the world have turned their attention to improving democracy by focusing on enhancing the quality of the communication that democracy requires. Scholars and activists from a broad variety of disciplines are engaged in the movement. Interdisciplinary networks such as the Democracy Imperative, the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium are bringing academics together on these issues, and outside of the academy, thousands of practitioners, activists, and otherwise concerned citizens are involved in organizations such as the National Issues Forums (NIF), AmericaSpeaks, and Everyday Democracy that are dedicated to improving public conversations and community problem solving.

One key organization involved in this work is the Kettering Foundation, an operating foundation dedicated to researching how to improve democracy. The foundation is a key supporter of the well-known NIF program, which for 25 years has supported a network of institutions across the country dedicated to deliberative democracy, including the Center for Public Deliberation that I direct at Colorado State University. Every summer, Kettering gathers activists and scholars from around the world in Dayton for the Democracy Exchange conference (DEX). I attended DEX in 2006 and 2007, and because of the clear connections between communication studies and the broader deliberative democracy movement, I developed a proposal for a DEX workshop specifically for communication scholars.

Communication is clearly critical to improving our democracy, and our field has always been particularly well-suited to move between theory and practice



and productively engage our communities. Presently, communication scholars focused on rhetoric studies, political communication, argumentation, debate, communication theory, dialogue, small group communication, environmental communication, intercultural

communication, and conflict resolution, among others, all have inherent connections to deliberative theory and practice, and many have been focused on improving democracy for years. Kettering

accepted my proposal, and provided funding for 26 scholars to attend. Attendees included: Betsy Bach, Linda Blong, Dawn Braithwaite, Michael X Delli-Carpini, Ken Cissna, John Gastil, Gerard Hauser, Michael Hogan, Bill Keith, Windy Lawrence, Stephen Littlejohn, Chris Lundberg, Idit Manosevitch, Jill McMillan, Sara Mehlretter, Gordon Mitchell, Barnett Pearce,

Kim Pearce, David Ryfe, Elizabeth Sink, Tim Steffensmeier, Daniel Wildeson, Kathleen Wong, David Zarefsky and myself. The group included scholars from a variety of areas within NCA, and at many levels, including graduate students, adjunct faculty, and assistant, associate,

and full professors. For three long but productive days, we gathered to discuss the question, "What is the role of the field of communication in helping democracy work as it should?" We focused on how we connect to democracy through our scholarship, our pedagogy, and our service, and further developed a broadening network of communication scholars focused on this work. The conversation will continue for many of us at the NCDD conference in October, as well as a NCA pre-conference seminar in San Diego. For more information on the workshop, or to connect with other communication scholars focusing on deliberative democracy, feel free to contact me at mcarcas@colostate.edu.