



THE PERICLEAN: Sharing updates and stories from our network of civic champions, delivered each month.

AAC&U Recap: Fostering Hope and Action in Higher Education

Dear Periclean colleagues,

It has been a challenging few weeks for higher education and democracy. To stakeholders on and beyond campuses: we see you, we stand with you, and we are dedicated to supporting you and your work. At Project Pericles, our deep commitment to civic engagement in higher education is stronger than ever.

We recently returned from the [AAC&U Annual Meeting](#), where the timely theme focused on reaffirming the public mission of higher education.

We presented two powerful sessions highlighting classroom and campus-based work at seven Periclean institutions. Our first session, [Disrupt Distrust: Fostering Well-Being and Resilience Through Democratic Engagement](#), drew a standing-room-only audience, highlighting the urgency of this issue. Executive Director Sanda Balaban opened the session situating the 2024 as an election of distrust, and of disruption, and underscoring how pervasive and corrosive distrust and lack of public confidence in the large majority of American institutions is today. Falling trust in the federal government along with rising public cynicism and alienation have led to a plunging sense of political efficacy of the average citizen from 70% to 30% over the last six decades. Faculty presenters shared examples of curricular, campus-wide, and community efforts with a civic orientation that are countering these forces and fostering meaningful connections in the service of building trust and agency.

The second session, [Strengthening Communities Through Curricular Partnerships](#), highlighted innovative models for community-engaged learning enhancing student well-being, civic identity, and career exploration. [Brian J. Evans](#), Assistant Professor of Dance at Bates College, helped welcome people into the space and into this moment through [performing his spoken word poem Shine](#), underscoring the power of collective care in challenging times.

Beyond our sessions, we connected with allied organizations and leaders who share our dedication to championing the public purpose of higher education. These conversations



William Harder (Goucher College) presents on integrating “democratic dialogues” in his first-year student seminar building students’ agency and problem-solving skills that can be built upon throughout their college experience.

reinforced a central theme: the need for collective commitment and action during a very challenging time for our democracy and civil society.

While we are navigating an era of deep challenges of distrust and disinvestment in institutions and uncertainties ahead, we also recognize the privilege and responsibility we have to address these challenges and turn them into opportunities.

Retaining a sense of agency—that things can be different and we can make them so— is essential, and we will continue to shine a spotlight on the vital work happening across our network to empower and equip students to be well-informed changemakers. This work has never been more important, and we hope you enjoy the spotlights featured in this newsletter.

Warmly, Team Project Pericles



We were grateful for the opportunity to share a dinner with colleagues from Bringing Theory to Practice, the Bonner Foundation, Campus Compact, the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Coalition, and Imagining America, exchanging ideas and celebrating important work happening across the field.

[Read our full article about the AAC&U Annual Meeting](#)

[Check out photo highlights](#)

Fostering Democracy and Expression: Highlights from our “Back to School for Democracy” Grants



Goucher College Student taking part in “Speak Up, Speak Out”

How do you transform a college campus into a hub of democratic engagement? It starts with bold ideas, creative initiatives, and dedicated leaders. Through our inaugural Back to School for Democracy Collaborative Fellowship, supported by the Mellon Foundation and The Eugene M. Lang Foundation, this fall we awarded eight mini-grants to empower campus communities to address civic and social justice challenges.

At Goucher College, students found their voices through the “Speak Up, Speak Out” project, sparking conversations on critical issues. Wagner College registered nearly 600 new voters through energetic outreach efforts, and Rhodes College engaged over 900 students through 19 events focused on voter education and



“Democratic engagement isn’t confined to voter mobilization work in the lead-up to an election, it’s a **part of an ongoing commitment to empower students and to elevate their voices.**”



engagement. These projects show that civic engagement doesn’t stop at the ballot box—it’s an ongoing effort that strengthens our communities and democracy.

Read more about our Back to School for Democracy program [here](#). *Faculty and students from Periclean institutions are encouraged to apply to support work on your campuses this spring—see information below.*

[Donate to Support Project Pericles](#)

Stay Connected on LinkedIn: “Faculty in Focus” Spotlight Series

Project Pericles is thrilled to announce a new way to engage with the incredible work of our Periclean community: our weekly *Faculty in Focus* spotlight series! [Follow us on LinkedIn](#), where every week we are highlighting inspiring stories, innovative projects, and impactful contributions on campuses through Periclean supported initiatives.

The series offers a mix of exciting content, including posts on our LinkedIn page alongside more in-depth articles on our website. So far we have featured compelling stories such as:

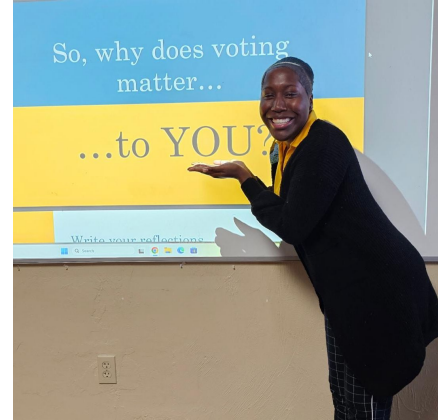
- Periclean Faculty Leader **Anita Chikkatur’s** transformative course on Carcerality and Education at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota
- Periclean Faculty Leader **Julia Chadaga’s** exciting interview project with local immigrants as part of her course, *Once We Arrived: Stories of Immigrants’ First Jobs* at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Civic Engagement Fellow **Allison Walker’s** insightful course *Empathetic Communications in a Digital World* at High Point University in High Point, North Carolina
- Civic Engagement Fellow **Shayla Robert’s** creative integration of civic education into her TESOL course at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida



“My hope was that if my students could get to know local immigrants as individuals, **that knowledge could shape the way these students would think and act in the future**, ideally with more understanding and compassion toward immigrant communities, and toward minoritized groups more broadly.”



Want to stay connected and inspired? [Connect with us on LinkedIn](#) and catch new features every Tuesday!



Bethune-Cookman College student Shania Sanders

□ Current Opportunities □

- **Civic Engagement Mini-Grants**, which provides **\$1,000 awards** for faculty and staff. Fellows empower students to *engage with public issues* in inclusive and collaborative ways, fostering more positive and broader *civic participation*. These grants are open to any higher education institution. The new track **Beyond Media Literacy: Enhancing Information Ecosystems to Bridge Divides** tackles vital issues related to media consumption which has created echo chambers, undermining our social fabric and the ability to have a truly “informed citizenry” which is foundational to democracy. **Priority Deadline: February 14**
[Click here for more information](#)

- **Back to School for Democracy Collaborative Fellowship** (for Periclean institutions) invites applications from faculty, staff, students, and administrators from schools within our Periclean network. Applicants can apply for **up to \$1,000** in funding to design and implement *a project, event, or event series to build capacity and vitality to address challenges and opportunities your campus is facing* this academic year. **Learn more [here](#).**



Students at a voter engagement event led by Blayne McDonald, Civic Engagement Fellow at Agnes Scott College.

□ Upcoming Events □

- **Periclean Community Conversations:**
February 17 from 12 - 1 PM ET. [Register here](#).
May 16 from 2 - 3 PM ET. [Register here](#)

(For colleagues at Periclean institutions or participating in Periclean fellowships only).

These virtual convenings offer the opportunity to connect with other Periclean fellows, faculty, and staff to share ideas, exchange resources, and spark inspiration.

☐ March 14: **Webinar: "Technology Empowered Dialogue: Within and Beyond the Classroom" with [Unify America](#)** from 3 - 3:45 PM ET. [Register here](#) (Open to everyone and will be recorded. The recording link will be shared with registered participants.)

Led by Periclean Fellow Dr. Emily Stacy, Arielle Mizrahi, and Matt Pollard, this webinar will explore strategies for integrating meaningful conversations into courses about today's most pressing issues using a digital platform that facilitates real-time, virtual discussions.

👉 **Pericleans in the Press** 👈

☐ Ron Cole, President of Allegheny College and Pericles Board Chair, was featured in the Meadville Tribune, highlighting his new role as Project Pericles board chair in the article [Allegheny College president elected as board chair of Project Pericles National Association](#).

☐ Brian Rosenberg, President Emeritus of Macalester College, published an insightful article, [Higher Ed's Governance Problem](#) in the December issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in this article he argues that many university boards of trustees are excessively large and ineffective, hindering their ability to provide proper oversight and strategic direction.

☐ **In Case You Missed It:** Periclean Faculty Leaders Danielle Lake and Sandy Marshall from Elon University published [Stories to Live and Build Bridges By: How Elon's Power+Place Collaborative is Transforming a University and Community](#) in the Spring 2024 issue of AAC&U's magazine, *Liberal Education*. This work, part of a project presented at our Project Pericles AAC&U session by Periclean Faculty Leader Danielle Lake, highlights the collaborative's transformative impact on both campus and community life.

☐ **What Staff are Reading** ☐

☐ Sanda (Executive Director) is reading [The Hidden Utility of the Liberal Arts](#) by Scott Carlson and Ned Laff in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and [Autocracy, Inc: The Dictators Who Want To Run the World](#) by Anne Applebaum, which examines how authoritarian regimes often work through covert networks to manipulate politics, economics, and society to maintain power, using both state and private sector resources and how to counter these threats.

☐ Arielle (Associate Director) is reading "[The Last Days of American Orange Juice](#)" by Yasmin Tayag in *The Atlantic*. It's a short and poignant read about the economic, environmental, and cultural decline of this former American breakfast staple. It serves as a reminder for the interconnectedness of the national and global issues we face, and the rapid change of our times.

☐ Chandler Murphy (Program Associate) is reading Bernhard Schlink's "[The Reader](#)", a novel that explores themes of guilt, love, and reconciliation in post-war Germany.

☐ Jason Vadnos (Intern) is reading Monica Guzman's book "[I Never Thought of it That Way](#)." A fascinating exploration of the social and cognitive processes which divide our society, and a wealth of practical tools to help overcome those divisions. Every American should read this book and seek to embrace curiosity!

What are YOU reading (or listening to--Sanda listens to most of her reading these days...)? None of us have enough time to read all that we wish we could, and we appreciate tips from readers and thinkers we admire. We would love to share your suggestions in our next newsletter! Email: [**Sanda@projectpericles.org**](mailto:Sanda@projectpericles.org)

If you have a story, event, or publication you'd like us to feature, please reach out! E-mail: [**chandler@projectpericles.org**](mailto:chandler@projectpericles.org)

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