

# SPACE: Student Perspectives About Civic Engagement

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## Civic Imagination: Dreaming through and beyond the Covid virus

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## SPACE Edition 4 Introductory Editorial

We are living in perilous, socially-distancing times. As I write this introduction to our fourth edition of *SPACE: Student Perspectives About Civic Engagement*, I am re-considering how important it is for all of us to act like citizens even as we self-segregate in order to stave off the worst possible outcomes of the Covid-19 virus. In Chicago, we demonstrate good citizenship when we hold ourselves accountable to new standards of social life. It may not feel great - and some bear the brunt of social isolation more than others to be sure, but the fact that we willingly or unwillingly retreat from most social situations may indicate that we care more about the collective good than our own immediate needs and interests. (Of course, it may indicate that we are more interested in self-preservation itself, but I will go with the sense of common good as our reason to consent to the new social conditions.)

Our current social condition hopefully will compel each of us to think into the future as we navigate the current state of affairs. What will our world look like on the other side of the Covid-19 virus or perhaps better stated as we learn to live with this and the potential of other emerging viruses that are as yet undetected? One possibility foreshadowed by Canadian-American author Naomi Klein is that we experience the next iteration of disaster capitalism, wherein corporations and politicians seek to capitalize on this most recent disaster. We already see evidence of some of this happening as some politicians engage in short term trading, as corporations seek increased de-regulation, companies engage in price-gouging, and the EPA even proposes to decrease pollution regulations. Another possibility is that we seek to patch ourselves up and get back to business as usual, a kind of let's just get through this mentality so we can return to normal. A third pathway is that we reflect on our current situation, consider what has led us to these peculiar set of circumstances, and then chart a way forward that resolves to be and to do things differently. I like the last option the best because it involves and engages civic dreaming cognizant of the machinery and machinations that have brought us into this precipitous space.

Our three authors engage in thoughtful consideration and reflection at this important time in the history of our democratic republic. Each wrote before the Covid-19 virus outbreak, but each unknowingly comments on our current social experience. Eduardo Palma, an Education student at Loyola University, reflects on his experience teaching a community-engaged curriculum at a neighboring high school as a first-year education student. This early hands-on learning opportunity proved valuable for him as he tried on teaching as a vocation and profession. It also gave him the opportunity to work with students as they explored and examined their own community in order to better understand the issues, organizations, and strategies that bring about change for the common good. Miriam Varela, a Physical Education student at Northeastern Illinois University, describes and reflects on her experiences at a diverse school as she examines culturally relevant physical education practices. The work in PE extends from Ladson-Billings (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and enables Miriam to consider physical education practices through a broader pedagogical framework. She raises important questions of how we play and how we might play more equitably together. Finally, Julia Grant, a VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) serving at the Civic Engagement Center at National Louis University reflects on a rotating art exhibit at her university placement - *Everyday Spaces*:

*Depictions of Community* – that enabled NLU artists to share their perceptions of community and inclusion. What are the thoughts, deliberations and questions that surface as the artists consider the nature of community and how are those musings transcribed to the canvas. Art is here, as always, a way to help us think about our context and, yes, be critical of it.

These three articles taken together give us the opportunity to think both now and into the future about how we perceive and understand our common spaces, how we engage in those physical spaces with one another, and how we think about solving problems in our communities. Though problem-solving is at the heart of much of what we think about on our blocks, in our neighborhoods and communities, cities and states, country and world, it is not ultimately who we are. We are citizens, certainly in our being, thinking and acting together in common spaces - even if for now they have been rendered uncommon - but first we are human beings with a deep need to be in relationship with one another. We see in this reality the common need we have – to associate – even as we strive to see and understand one another as unique, differently-gifted, and open to a variety of moral ecologies and political philosophies. The challenge to our country and even to our world is to hold these two notions in tension – the *pluribus* and the *unum* as we contemplate and shape our collective futures.

Our hope, as you read this long-anticipated fourth edition of *SPACE*, is that you will see glimpses of our common work and our common humanity even as you see and try to make sense of the beautiful diversity our world offers. Our hope is that our ability and desire to be in relationship with one another overwhelms our baser instincts to settle into tribes that inhibit our opportunity to glimpse hopefully into the future and seek the best for each other and for our planet.

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