# ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

## Announcing a Joint ADP/TDC National Initiative

America has long been heralded as the "land of opportunity," but consider:

- The average student loan debt for the class of 2012 was $29,400;[1] this doesn't account for any debt accrued in graduate school.
- Between 1947 and 1972, the average hourly wage, adjusted for inflation, rose 76 percent. Since 1972, by contrast, the average hourly wage has risen only four percent.[2]
- In 2011 the poverty rate for female-headed families with children was 40.9 percent.[3]
- In 2009, CEOs of major U.S. corporations averaged 263 times the average compensation of American workers.[4]
- Between 1979 and 2007, wages for the top one percent rose almost 10 times as fast as those for the bottom 90 percent: 156.2 percent versus 16.7 percent.[5]
- "[T]he two years in the last hundred that mark the apogees of inequality—when the richest one percent received a record 23.5 percent of total income—were 1928 and 2007."[6]
- An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development study found that almost 884,000 excess deaths per year in the United States could be attributed to high levels of income inequality.[7]

Some degree of economic inequality occurs naturally in a free and open society, but a vibrant democracy experiencing these dramatic trends ought to be asking tough questions:

- How did the extreme inequality we find today happen?
- What are the implications of such dramatic economic inequality?
- How much inequality is too much?
- If these trends undermine the integrity of our democracy, then what can we do?

Our democracy deserves answers to these questions.

Growing economic inequality is transforming our society, our economy, and how citizens interact with each other and with government. It may not take an expert to see that this is fundamentally changing our democracy. However, it does take expertise—the kind built collaboratively on our campuses and in our communities—to understand this transformation and to identify ways for institutions of higher education to develop and share experiential, co-curricular and curricular modules designed to educate and prepare the next generation of informed, engaged citizens.

### This is a Call for Participation

The American Democracy Project (ADP) and The Democracy Commitment (TDC) seek a small cohort of two- and four-year member institutions to join us in a three-year initiative co-led by Keene State College (N.H.) and Mount Wachusett Community College (Mass.) to understand the impact of economic inequality on our democracy. The goal of this initiative is to help students think about and take action to confront the complex causes of growing economic inequality. We envision developing, implementing and documenting innovative, interactive curricula and experiential learning modules that can be adapted across our campuses and communities. We hope that institutions will also be engaged in developing civic pathways for student success—connections between our two- and four-year institutions—around this topic.

Participating institutions will work together to study the relationship between public policy, economic inequality, economic opportunity and social mobility to prepare undergraduates for lives of informed civic engagement. Participation in the initiative is open to any ADP or TDC member institution.

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## What Are the Benefits for Participating Campuses?

This initiative offers a number of significant opportunities for campuses and individuals including:

**Opportunities for Faculty, Staff and Students:**

- To become involved in an innovative national project
- To collaborate with teams of individuals on other campuses in the creation of curricular, co-curricular and experiential learning modules designed for potential adoption by campuses across the country
- To participate in the development of a "blended" course on economic inequality, both at the associate's and bachelor's degree levels
- To engage students in curricula and local and community-based research, as well as in co-curricular and experiential activities that promote civic learning and action
- To assist students in developing a sense of civic agency and empowerment regarding economic inequality
- To present and publish work related to this initiative

**Opportunities for Campuses:**

- To gain visibility as part of a national effort that touches on vital questions related to economic inequality that are at the center of today's political and social movements
- To engage students, faculty, staff and communities around issues of economic inequality
- To be an early adopter of curricular, co-curricular and experiential modules designed to inform and enhance the civic learning and engagement of students, faculty and staff

## What Are the Expectations for Participating Campuses?

Participating campuses will be asked to make a three-year commitment to the initiative with the recognition that the individuals involved may change and how the initiative is implemented on each campus may look somewhat different. Ideally, we hope that each institution will create a team to oversee the development of curriculum, activities and projects. For operational purposes, campuses are asked to identify a campus team leader to provide leadership for the campus work and to serve as our primary contact. While it is not a formal requirement, we request that teams include representatives from both academics and student affairs; we also believe the project will benefit from the inclusion of students on your team.

All ADP/TDC institutions are encouraged to apply. We encourage campuses to consider partnering with a regional ADP or TDC partner institution as part of our effort to foster relationships between our two- and four-year institutions and to create civic pathways for student success.

This initiative will hold an organizational meeting in January of 2015 at The Washington Center in Washington, D.C. (for planning purposes: January 4–11, 2015). At least one person from each participating campus should plan to attend, but we encourage campuses to send an institutional team, including a student. We anticipate at least one national gathering a year for each of the three years of the project, usually held in conjunction with the annual ADP/TDC national meeting (for planning purposes: June 4–6, 2015 in New Orleans; June 2–4, 2016 in Indianapolis).

Most activities will take place on each participating campuses, with networking and support provided by the two collaborating lead institutions, Keene State College and Mount Wachusett Community College. We also envision a series of national conference calls and webinars.

## How Much Will it Cost to Participate?

There is no fee for participation in the project; overall costs should be quite low. There is no external funding identified yet for this project, but we anticipate potentially seeking support and/or partnerships and aim to keep costs minimal. At this time, campuses will incur an initial cost for sending an individual or team of individuals to the organizational meeting

in January of 2015 in Washington, D.C., which will include travel expenses and a conference fee. Similarly, attending the annual ADP/TDC national meeting will include travel and conferences fees.

## How Do We Apply?

To apply, a representative from the campus (e.g., campus coordinator) should obtain institutional support from the campus president (TDC) or chief academic officer (ADP), complete the form below and email it to Kim Schmidl-Gagne at *kgagne@keene.edu*.

The deadline for applications is **Monday, September 15, 2014**. Institutions selected for participation will be notified no later than **Wednesday, October 1, 2014**.

## Endnotes

[1] *http://money.cnn.com/2013/12/04/pf/college/student-loan-debt/*

[2] *http://inequality.org/income-inequality/*

[3] *http://www.epi.org/publication/female-headed-families-children-poverty/*

[4] *http://inequality.org/income-inequality/*

[5] *http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/fact-sheets/inequality-facts/*

[6] Reich, R. (2013). Aftershock. New York: Vintage Books.

[7] *http://inequality.org/inequality-health/*

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## Application

To apply, the president, chief academic officer (CAO) or campus coordinator should complete the form below and email it to Kim Schmidl-Gagne (kgagne@keene.edu).

**The deadline for applications is Monday, September 15, 2014**. Institutions selected for participation will be notified no later than Wednesday, October 1, 2014.

Name of Individual Completing Application: _____

Title: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____

Institution Name: _____

Institution Designation (check one): ☐ ADP (four-year) ☐ TDC (two-year)

Will this person be the primary campus contact person for this initiative (check one)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If no, please provide the primary contact person's information:

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____

Please respond to the following statements/questions in a separate Word document.

1. Based on the description of opportunities in the "Call for Participation," please discuss your institution's interest in this initiative.

2. Please describe what you anticipate your campus' three-year commitment to look like. (E.g.: Who will be involved? How will the work be organized and supported? What existing efforts or structures might it tie into?)

3. ADP and TDC are committed to advancing civic pathways for students between our two- and four-year institutions. Given this commitment, we encourage campuses to consider partnering with a regional ADP or TDC partner institution as part of our effort to foster relationships between our two- and four-year institutions and to create civic pathways for student success. Please identify and discuss any current working relationships with a potential partner institution and how you foresee moving forward with curricular and co-curricular efforts associated with this initiative. (Note: You are not required to have a partner institution to participate in this initiative.)

Signature of President or Chief Academic Officer: _____

Printed Name of President or Chief Academic Officer: _____