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UNH Launches National Higher Education Effort Devoted To "Deliberative Democracy"

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DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire has established a national higher education network devoted to fostering deliberative democracy.

UNH recently hosted a national conference, "The Democracy Imperative: Mobilizing Higher Education for Deliberative Democracy," that brought together scholars, campus leaders, and civic leaders in the fields of public deliberation, democratic dialogue, and social change who are dedicated to mobilizing higher education for a stronger and more effective democracy.

"The Democracy Imperative is concerned with three primary aspects of the roles of universities and colleges — how we create a learning environment in classes and in co-curricular programs that educate for citizenship and civic engagement, how we act as equal partners with the communities in which we are located, and how we govern ourselves as democratic institutions. These topics were at the core of the national meeting," said UNH Provost Bruce Mallory, who coordinated the conference. The conference also was supported by the UNH Foundation.

UNH will serve as the hub of a national higher education network that will advocate for education that supports the democratic aspects of public life – social and political systems and behaviors that are inclusive, deliberative, and responsive and that provide people with meaningful ways to work collaboratively to improve society.

"Colleges and universities can do more than talk about the history of and challenges to American freedom, justice, and equality. They can play a more significant role in examining public policy and government acts, and challenging those that seem to by-pass or override democratic principles and practices. They can address the need for more knowledge and foster more passionate and principled citizen engagement," Mallory said.

In a deliberative democracy, the processes of decision-making involve citizens deliberating about public problems and solutions under conditions that are conducive to reflection, informed reasoning, inclusive and respectful dialogue, and collective action. Deliberative democracy is often contrasted with *adversarial democracy*, a process of decision-making that is based on competition among special interests, the protection of individual rights, and the opinions of an elite group of experts or individuals in power.

"This network will cultivate a field of practice for advancing deliberative democracy through higher education. It will provide committed practitioners and scholars with an opportunity to work together to deepen their own work while simultaneously reforming higher education.

And in doing so, it will help move this nation toward a stronger and more effective democracy," Mallory said.

For more information about deliberative democracy and UNH's effort, visit:
<http://www.unh.edu/academic-affairs/democracy/index.html>.

