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## New Ideas on Public Deliberation from Young Scholars. Introduction: Innovations in Deliberative Electoral Designs

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# New Ideas on Public Deliberation from Young Scholars. Introduction: Innovations in Deliberative Electoral Designs

## **Abstract**

In this introduction, we discuss the importance of innovation in advancing deliberative democratic theory and practice. Prior examples reviewed include the Citizens' Jury, the Deliberative Poll, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, and particularly the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review. We then preview the five essays that make up this special section of the *Journal of Public Deliberation*, which collects writings by graduate students who participated in a summer seminar on deliberative democracy. These essays propose ways to advance electoral deliberation in the U.S. and Guam, in classrooms, newsrooms, meeting rooms, and online discussions. The innovations suggest new ways to think about lobbying, teaching, reporting, campaigning, and voting, and many combine different deliberative mechanisms to maximize the potential for public talk to create a more inclusive and influential deliberative politics.

## **Keywords**

democratic deliberation, deliberative democracy

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Democracy has proven a subject that can satisfy a scholar's intellectual curiosity while simultaneously providing the opportunity to innovate in the practical affairs of self-governance. For more than two centuries, the pace of democratic reform has been remarkable, with transformations in the definition of the electorate, the ways candidates get selected for offices high and low, and the nature and reach of public education and media whereby an informed public takes shape. Much of what we take for granted as basic democratic practices in the United States and across the globe did not exist until only very recently. More importantly, each of these commonplace institutions—universal franchise, direct election, free speech, and much more—was a radical idea in its time.

The modern conception of deliberative democracy has an even shorter timeframe. The crest of the wave of practical deliberative reforms could be traced back to the 1970s, when Teledemocracy and Citizens' Juries started in the United States and Planning Cells took root in Germany (Becker & Slaton, 2000; Crosby & Nethercutt, 2005; Hendriks, 2005). Those early experiments seeded the idea of using random samples of the public for more than just polling, though the Deliberative Poll's emergence in the 1990s showed that even polls could be recast in deliberative ways (Fishkin, 1997). The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly then brought many of these different elements together, though its creators were largely unaware of the intellectual developments preceding it (Warren & Pearse, 2008).

The experience of the first author of this introduction provides one example of how ideas and reform can intersect. After learning about the Citizens' Juries and meeting their founder, Ned Crosby, Gastil wrote *By Popular Demand* in 2000, which advocated the development of citizen panels to review candidates and ballot measures. Crosby had worked out similar ideas earlier, and he and Gastil collaborated off-and-on with what became the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR), a particular design then championed by two civic reformers in Oregon, Tyrone Reitman and Elliot Shuford. With many other hands on deck as well, Reitman and Shuford persuaded the Oregon legislature to institute the CIR in 2009, and the state then voted to continue the CIR in its 2011 session after an initial round of success (Knobloch et al., 2013).

This collection of essays has its origin in this tradition of theoretical innovation and practical experimentation. Associate Professor Pradeep Sopory invited Gastil to host a Summer Doctoral Seminar at his university from May 30-June 2, 2012. The seminar, on "Bringing Deliberative Democracy into Electoral Politics," brought together more than a dozen graduate students from across the United States to discuss candidates, campaigns, and voters in local, state, and federal elections, and the seminar evaluated reforms, such as the Oregon CIR, which aim to make the electoral process more deliberative and democratic.

In just a few short days, students came up with reform proposals of their own, and after the seminar concluded, each was invited to submit a solo or collaborative proposal. Gastil teamed with Penn State doctoral candidate Robert Richards to help the students develop their proposals, and a subset of those then were sent out for peer review. Not every submitted essay was selected for publication in this symposium, but every one that does appear underwent considerable revision. The result is a set of essays that we believe presents original ideas, new syntheses of existing methods, and a spirit of creative

innovation that has fueled many a far-fetched idea, some of which mature into real institutions. Perhaps twenty years from now, we will be able to look back and point to one or two reforms that drew a measure of inspiration from this symposium.

We devote the remainder of our introduction to previewing the essays themselves. Two of them explore pedagogical applications of deliberative democratic processes. In “Teaching, Practicing, and Performing Deliberative Democracy in the Classroom,” Hayley Cole demonstrates how the CIR method can be employed to teach democratic argumentation at the undergraduate level. In the CIR, a group of eighteen to twenty-four randomly selected citizens gather as a panel for one week to hear witnesses and gain in-depth knowledge about a ballot initiative, and then decide whether to recommend approval or rejection of the initiative (Knobloch et al., 2013). After coming to a decision, the panel collectively writes a statement describing their key factual findings, their votes for and against the initiative, and their rationales for taking those positions. The panel’s statement, which is published in an official voter guide sent to all voters before the election, can then serve as a highly informative cue to voters regarding the opinions of a fully informed representative body of citizens about the initiative.

Cole’s deliberative design for the classroom setting closely follows the CIR procedures, in terms of the size of the panel, the segmentation of the process between an initial learning stage and a subsequent decision-making stage, the collective composition of the panelists’ statement, and the publication of the statement to inform the public. Some effects of the CIR on students in Cole’s classroom also paralleled those produced by the actual CIR process in Oregon, particularly increases in knowledge, political self-efficacy, and faith in the deliberative process. To enable readers to apply the CIR in their own classrooms, Cole’s essay includes a complete lesson plan. Also notable about Cole’s essay is its exemplification of two theoretical principles of deliberative pedagogy: Griffin’s (2011) contention that a “mediated” approach to deliberative instruction can enable students to develop new skills and realize their latent capacity for deliberation; and Parker’s (2003, 2006) ideal of “enlightened political engagement,” according to which classroom deliberation enables students both to grow in understanding of social issues and to experience membership in the body politic through collective decision making on a matter of public concern.

Tiara Na’puti and Allison Hahn, in “Plebiscite Deliberations: Self-Determination and Deliberative Democracy in Guam,” likewise place students at the center of a deliberative design informed by the Citizens Jury. Na’puti and Hahn’s approach differs from Cole’s, however, in that the former involves a more complex design, a larger public role for student-focused deliberation, and, arguably, a more challenging political context: a momentous plebiscite on national independence for Guam, conducted within a highly contentious mass-mediated environment.

Na’puti and Hahn’s deliberative design is distinctive both for its structure and for its approach to linking micro-level small-group deliberation to macro-level electoral communication. Na’puti and Hahn propose a two-stage process employing two different deliberative methods. In part one, using procedures based on Crosby’s Citizens Jury method and very similar to Cole’s design, middle- and high-school students in Guam would participate in classroom deliberations about the three plebiscite options and write

statements describing their decisions. In part two, after distributing their statements online and in print, the students, joined by adult advocates, would participate in a series of public debates, organized on the model of National Forensic League (NFL) debates, about the three plebiscite options. To connect the students' micro-level deliberations with the macro-level mass deliberation about the plebiscite, two separate methods would be used: a textual cue in the form of a printed statement, and interpersonal discussion in a public forum. First, the statements the students produced in their classroom deliberations would be made available on the Internet and in print throughout the community. Second, at the NFL-style public debates, audience members would receive print copies of the students' statements and would engage in dialogue about the issues with the debaters.

Apart from the sophistication of its deliberative design, Na'puti and Hahn's proposal is distinguished in its attempts to address several of the formidable challenges posed by its political context. Among these are the significance of the outcome, the complexity of the ballot, and the role of historical context. The 2015 plebiscite is of enormous import to the residents of Guam because it will determine the island's constitutional status while it could powerfully influence the island's political and economic relationships with the U.S. and other nations. Na'puti and Hahn's proposal addresses this in part by using multiple methods to communicate deliberative results to the electorate and by employing a complex design informed by two tested deliberative methods to increase the likely quality of the deliberations. Moreover, voters' ballot choices involve complex legal questions that must be carefully distilled to be made comprehensible. In Na'puti and Hahn's deliberative design students devote considerable attention to acquiring an understanding of each plebiscite choice and discovering language to communicate that information effectively to voters. Finally, aware that the memories of previous plebiscites on Guam's status form an important dimension of the rhetorical situation of the 2015 election, Na'puti and Hahn incorporate this vital historical memory into their deliberative process by inviting older citizens to testify in the classroom deliberations about their experiences of the earlier plebiscites.

In "Deliberative Television," Ashley Muddiman and Matthew Meier envision using public-journalism techniques to revive local television news coverage in the U.S. Muddiman and Meier's proposal is notable in at least three respects. First, like Na'puti and Hahn's plan for the Guam plebiscite, Muddiman and Meier's proposal to revive local television with deliberative content employs a complex, two-stage deliberative design involving multiple methods of deliberation: an initial stage of agenda-setting deliberation and a subsequent stage based on the CIR. This design integrates citizens more fully into the deliberative process by allowing them to determine the topics of subsequent citizen deliberations. Second, Muddiman and Meier's proposal stands out because of its goals: in addition to the conventional public-journalism objectives of fostering democratic engagement among viewers and offering broadcasters a means of fulfilling their civic duty (Rosen, 1999), Muddiman and Meier's objectives include using recordings of citizens' deliberations to create better television news content. Following Belt and Just (2008) and Patterson (2000), Muddiman and Meier predict that the high quality of this deliberative news content is likely to boost viewership and thus bolster the economic viability of local television stations. Third, Muddiman and Meier sketch out opportunities

for creative cooperation between local news broadcasters, on the one hand, and universities and nonprofit organizations, on the other, with the latter sharing with the stations the cost of putting on deliberative events while also contributing expertise in facilitation and evaluation.

Like Na'puti and Hahn and Muddiman and Meier, Jeff Swift employs a complex, multi-stage, multi-method deliberative design in his proposal for a "People's Lobby." In an initial Priority Conference stage (Gastil, 2000; Gastil & Richards, 2013), a self-selected sample of citizens would identify and prioritize issues needing state action. In the next stage a randomly selected sample of citizens, resembling the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, would choose one of the top-ranked issues from the first stage, deliberate on the issue, and then draft legislation to address the issue.

Three other aspects of Swift's proposal seem noteworthy. First, the "People's Lobby" integrates advocacy into the deliberative process: after the Citizens' Assembly has drafted its legislation, its members are to lobby legislators to persuade them to enact the bill. Swift characterizes this striking feature of his deliberative design as an operationalization of Garsten's (2006, 2011) call to incorporate individual interests into public deliberation, as part of the larger project of reviving the rhetorical dimension of political discourse. Second, Swift's design includes an unusual participant selection method—random selection from an initial self-selected sample—that has recently attracted attention because of its apparently successful use by the California Redistricting Commission (Mac Donald, 2012). Third, Swift seeks to enact through his proposal the principles of Pfister and Godana's (2012) notion of "deliberative technology": by such means as incorporating active human facilitation into the online deliberation process, Swift's "People's Lobby" aims to realize the analytic and social goals of deliberation in an online environment.

In common with several other essays in this issue, Anna Wiederhold's "Local Art, Local Action" proposal turns on a complex deliberative design involving multiple stages and methods, and culminating in the production of a voter's guide that links a deliberative mini-public to a wider voting public. Wiederhold calls for an initial stage of agenda-setting to be performed by a self-selected group of citizens who attend a real-life community festival. The issues raised and prioritized in this first phase are taken up in the second phase, an online deliberation about candidates for public office, modeled after Citizens' Juries. In this second deliberation, a randomly selected panel of twenty-four citizens would pose to candidates questions based on the issues prioritized in the first stage, and then evaluate the candidates based on their responses. In the final stage, the results of the second-stage deliberation would be printed as a voter's guide, which would be distributed to citizens to inform their electoral choices.

What particularly differentiates Wiederhold's design, however, are the attributes of its initial agenda-setting stage. First, this stage integrates citizens' creativity into the deliberative process in an innovative way: by framing the issue-identification component of the agenda-setting task as a photography exhibit. This feature responds to the call by critics of deliberation such as Bryan Garsten (2006, 2011) and Iris Marion Young (1996, 2000) to incorporate expressive communication into deliberative procedures. Second, the issue-ranking component of Wiederhold's agenda-setting process stands out for the way

in which it links micro-level and macro-level political participation: issues are prioritized by visitors to the community festival who must register on the spot to vote for the upcoming election before they may cast their votes to rank the issues in the agenda-setting exercise. Finally, by placing the agenda-setting process within a community festival, Wiederhold seeks to operationalize principles of the social theory of public space (Lefebvre, 1991; Mitchell, 1995; Vershaffel, 2009) within a deliberative design. Drawing on this public-space theory, Wiederhold views the agenda-setting phase of the deliberative design as a discursive and deliberative “space,” which is governed by a particular set of norms and is characterized by a particular set of social practices. Likewise the grounds of the community festival, within which the agenda-setting process occurs, are seen as a physical public space, having its own unique set of practices and norms. In Wiederhold’s design, the norms and practices of the deliberative space of the agenda-setting activity and the physical space of the community festival are interwoven with, complement, and enhance each other.

One may not agree with particular elements or arrangements in these various proposals, but we hope that readers find something that sparks their imagination by reading across these different students’ ideas for how to fashion a more deliberative democracy. As we said at the outset, the path from theoretical ideas to practical innovation often twists and turns, often times making intellectual debts ambiguous, unpaid, or forgotten. Whether these essays have a direct impact on future civic reforms or simply feed into the river of ideas that crosses through the public domain, we are confident that the young scholars who wrote these essays have made a contribution to the future of deliberative democratic design.

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