Developing Informed and Engaged Citizens: The Imperative for Higher Education

EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) Web Symposium

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Part One: The Issue

Dewey reminded us...

“The trouble…is that we have taken our democracy for granted; we have thought and acted as if our forefathers had founded it once and for all. We have forgotten that it has to be enacted anew in every generation.”

John Dewey
Hurricane Katrina demonstrated what happens when government doesn’t work...when we’re not all in the same boat.
Janadas Devan, Straits Times columnist:

"[But] it is not only government that doesn't show up when government is starved of resources and leached of all its meaning. Community doesn't show up either, sacrifice doesn't show up, pulling together doesn't show up, 'we're all in this together' doesn't show up."
The Need for Engaged Citizenship

• The global problems we confront are more ominous: global pandemics, global warming, terrorism, the viability of the nation-state

• The national problems we confront are more insistent: role of science v. religion, political polarization, capitalism v. democracy, health care, growing divide between rich and poor

To address these issues effectively, we must have an educated and engaged citizenry
Some Threats to American Democracy

• Decline in social capital
• Increasing inequality
• Atomization of interests, news sources and the pervasive focus on entertainment
• Influence of money on politics
• Decreasing levels of political participation
A Decline in Social Capital

Declining Social Capital: Trends over the last 25 years
Attending Club Meetings ↓ Down by 58%
Family dinners ↓ Down by 33%
Having friends over ↓ Down by 45%

Factors Contributing to Declining Social Capital
Commuting (Each 10 minutes = 10% reduced participation)
Television
Two parents working

Less Social Capital (esp. bridging social capital) =
Less Democracy
Studies in the United States and Italy

Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone
Increasing Inequality

• Disparities of income, wealth, and access to opportunity are growing more sharply in the U. S. than in many other nations

• People with wealth are “roaring with a clarity and consistency that public officials readily hear and routinely follow.” Citizens “with lower or moderate incomes are speaking with a whisper.”

• Progress toward American ideals of democracy may have stalled, and in some arenas reversed.

American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality, Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, American Political Science Association, 2004, www.apsanet.org
The Economist 2005

Corporate Compensation
30 years ago: Average compensation of top 100 CEOs was 30 times the pay of average workers
Today: 1,000 times the pay of the average worker

School Systems
Increasingly stratified by social class in which poor children attend school with fewer resources

Universities
Increasingly reinforcing rather than reducing educational inequalities

United States risks calcifying into a European-style, class-based society.
Atomization of Interests, News Sources and the Pervasive Focus on Entertainment

- The number of registered lobbyists in Washington has more than doubled since 2000, from 16,342 to 34,750
- More television channels, more talk radio, Internet, blogs, etc.
- 40 million watched American Idol finale; 37 million watched 2nd Bush/Gore debate.
- Average age of network news viewer: 60
Money and Politics

2000: Bush $ 193; Gore $ 134. Total 2000 = $ 327 million
2004: Bush $ 293; Kerry $ 252. Total 2004 = $ 545 Million
60 % increase in cost in 4 years

.09 % of population gives at least $ 1,000 to political campaigns, 55% of funds raised

¼ of Congress are millionaires; 1% of U.S.

“The sad thing is that in America today if it’s going to take $2 million to win, then normal people can’t run anymore. You either have to be very, very wealthy or very, very, very bought.”

Janice Bowling, Republican Nominee for Tennessee’s 4th District
Frederick Webber, 30+ years as lobbyist in Washington, President of Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers

“Political fundraising in this town has gotten out of control. What are the priorities here? This thing has gotten away from us.”

Washington Post, September 12, 2005

Ernest Hollings, 38 years in the U.S. Senate

“There is a cancer on the body politic: money. The result of this nonsense is that almost one-third of a senator's time is spent fundraising.”

Washington Post, February 19, 2006
Decreasing Levels of Political Participation

Participation in presidential elections has declined by 25% over the past thirty-six years.

Opportunities for participation: Number of school board seats has shrunk by 86% since 1930, even as the population has more than doubled.

The lowest voter participation rate (53%) is among the fastest growing part of the population (Hispanic Americans).

U.S. ranks 139 out of 172 nations in voter turnout, below all other industrialized democracies, including Switzerland.
So who will we turn to make sure these issues of democracy get addressed?

The 18-25 year olds… the net generation.
Lack of Civic Understanding

- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Survey 112,003 high school students in 2004: 36% believe that newspapers should get “government approval” of stories before publishing

- Fewer than half of persons 15-26 years old think that communicating with elected officials, volunteering, or donating money to help others are qualities of a good citizen

- On NAEP 1998 Civics, 23% of 4th graders, 23% of 8th graders, and 26% of 12th graders scored at or above proficient
• 75.2% know what city zip code 90210 is. Only 25.5% know that Philadelphia is the city where the Constitution was written.

• 81.2% know how many members in the music group “Hanson.” Only 21.2% know how many senators serve in the U.S. Senate.

• 87% know the name of the football player found not guilty of murdering his wife. Only 9% know the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education.

• 63.7% know that “The Club” protects against car theft. Only 25% of respondents know that the Fifth Amendment protects against double jeopardy/self incrimination, etc.

• 59.2% know the names of the three stooges. Only 41.2% know the names of the three branches of government.

• 89% know the father in Home Improvement. Only 32% know the Speaker of the House.

Survey of 600 students age 13-17, National Constitution Center, 1998
Decline in Political Participation

The youngest generation of voters has the greatest distrust of others

Most people look out for themselves
Most people would take advantage of you

The youngest voters have the lowest participation in presidential elections.

But do we really want them involved?
Do we really want them to vote?

Recent AIR/Pew Study (January 2006)

More than 50% of students at 4 yr. colleges do not score at the “proficient level of literacy.”

That means that they cannot compare credit card offers with different interest rates or summarize the arguments in newspaper editorials.

Good News
Literacy level higher among students who say their coursework requires applying theories and concepts to practical problems.
• Our democracy is threatened
• P-12 schools are not addressing citizenship skills
• Developmental psychologists tell us that the most important period for the growth of civic skills and habits is ages 15-25

What Choice Do We Have?
It’s not enough to prepare a competent workforce or engage in economic development

Who will contribute to charitable causes, serve on boards and committees, volunteer for service organizations?

Who will join others in community dialogue, stay informed of the critical issues, express their opinion?

Who will serve on juries, vote, and run for office?

Who will work with others to build strong, sustainable communities with good schools, recreation and parks, community support organizations?
“Somebody has to do something, and it's just incredibly pathetic that it has to be us.”

Jerry Garcia
What Are The Strategies We Are Using To Address Declining Civic Engagement?
Definition of Civic Engagement

“Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference.”

“Promoting” the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS FIRST THREE YEARS
American Democracy Project
211 institutions, 1.6+ million students

Meetings
• 3 National meetings
  700 + participants
• 9 Regional meetings
  500 + participants

Conceptual Design Process
• Wingspread Conference
  40 participants, publication

Assessment Project
• National Survey of Student Engagement questionnaire
  32 institutions, 13,000+ students

Programs
• IUPUI meeting on Civic Engagement
  105 participants
• “Inside The Times”
  270 participants, 2 years
• Civic Engagement in Action Series launched
Hundreds of Campus Projects

- Campus Audits
- Campus Conversations
- Voter Education/Registration Projects
- Curriculum Revision Projects
- Library Projects
- First Year Projects, Capstone Courses
- Fine Arts Projects, Graduation Pledges
- Speaker Series, Democracy Day
- Recognition and Award Programs

A recent Google search = 86,000 entries for term ADP
A New Series
Civic Engagement in Action

5 already launched

- Stewardship of Public Lands
- First Year
- Jury Service
- Voting
- Democracy Abroad
The Stewardship of Public Lands

**Issue:** How are controversies over public lands resolved in a democracy?

**Partner:** Yellowstone Association

**Activities:**

**2005 Wolf Reintroduction:** Presidents/CAOs, Faculty Seminars.

**2006 Politics and the Yellowstone Ecosystem:** Faculty Seminar, National Program Spring 2007 with The New York Times
Civic Engagement in the First Year of College

**Issue:** How can civic engagement be fostered and encouraged in the first year of college?

**Partner:** Policy Center for the First Year of College, North Carolina; First Year Center, South Carolina; Carnegie Foundation, California

**Activities:** 8 campuses have been selected to work with Tom Ehrlich and his colleagues at Carnegie

**Monograph:** The New York Times and First Year Center will produce a monograph in 2008
Jury Service as Democratic Participation

**Issue:** How can colleges and universities support federal and state court systems in encouraging jury participation?

**Partner:** American Judicature Society, National Center for State Courts; Council for Court Excellence

**Activities:**

**2005:** Activities underway on 11 campuses
Electoral Voice: Organizing for Voting

**Issue:** What lessons did our ADP campuses and others learn about the best ways to provide voter registration, voter information, and voter participation?

**Partner:** Indiana University, Purdue University-Indianapolis

**Activities:** Monograph being developed for release in Fall 2006; Young Voter Strategies grant project underway to register 50,000 new voters this fall
Civic Engagement in Other Lands

**Issue:** How can universities in other countries support their emerging democracies?

**Partner:** Association of Universities for Democracy (AUDEM)

**Activities:** Initial meeting in November 2004 in Hungary; 15 ADP campuses have created partnerships with non-U.S. institutions to exchange ideas, programs, etc.
Opportunities For Action

- Libraries
- Faculty Development
- Assessment
- Voter Registration Education
- Capstone Courses
- Service Learning
- Teacher Education
- Campus Culture
- First Year Programs
- Co-Curriculum
- General Education
What does it take to create civically-engaged graduates?

3 Critical Features:

**Institutional Intention**
(leadership, culture, policies)

**Programs and Activities**
(curriculum, co-curriculum)

**Measuring Results**
(institutional and course/program results, using NSSE, Carnegie, HERI tools)
Institutional Intentionality

- Leadership: at lots of levels
- Culture: reflecting widely-shared beliefs
- Statements: mission statements, accreditation documents, promotional materials, etc.
- Policies
- Administrative structures
- Budget
- Rewards and recognition
Programs and Activities

**Knowledge**: Teaching democratic values, traditions, history of democracies, U.S. history

**Skills**: Teaching communications, critical thinking, collective decision-making, organizational skills, etc.

**Experiences**: Designing campus and community experiences for knowledge and application

**Reflection**: Creating explicit connections between experiences and civic obligations
Knowledge

History of the United States
What is the history of the U.S. that all undergraduates need to know? What are the themes and issues? What would you use as a measure of completion?

Principles of Democracy
What are the core principles of democracy that all undergraduates must understand? What is the irreducible list of books that must be read? What would you use as a test of democratic principles?
Skills

Communications: writing, speaking, etc.

Critical thinking: analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, etc.

Collective decision-making: deliberating, listening, working as a team, making collective decisions, compromising, identifying and solving public problems

Organization: organizing planning projects, influencing policy decisions, implementing policy decisions, taking collective actions
Experiences

What are the experiences on and off campus that could be designed to foster citizenship understanding?

What might be involved?

Group work, experiences with diversity, community, leadership, compromise, struggle, imperfect conclusions, other?
Reflection

How could reflection be built into the curriculum to foster deeper understanding, self-awareness, and greater conviction?

Who would be involved? Faculty, other students, community members, others?
Where are knowledge, skills, experiences, and reflection found in the curriculum?

- In first year programs
- In capstone courses
- In the general education curriculum
- In majors and minors

Where are knowledge, skills, experiences, and reflection found in the co-curriculum?

- In student government
- In student organizations
- In residence halls
- In joint academic affairs/student affairs programs
Measuring Results

How would you measure citizenship outcomes in undergraduates?

What are the metrics you would use to assess your institution’s success?
Measuring Results: NSSE and ADP Consortium

Three questions-13,000 students

1. What do you care about and how much (education, healthcare, environment, national security, etc.)?

2. What activities did you do and why (fundraise, sign a petition, participate in a boycott, run for office, vote)?

3. Where do you get information about news, volunteering, etc.?
What was found in that survey?

- Not much difference among many types of institutions.
- Small differences in gender and ethnicity.
- 50% of students get their news from television.

What else is needed?

- More info on sources of information
- More info on number/duration of activities
- Information on sense of political efficacy
- Qualitative as well as quantitative info
Other Research Findings

1. Participation in democratically run student organizations is a more powerful predictor of future political participation than taking courses in American politics or political science.

2. The more courses a student takes in science or engineering, the less they participate politically.

3. The more courses a student takes in business, the less they engage in community service, vote, or try to influence the political process.

4. Students who spend time volunteering during college become more convinced that individuals can change society, feel more committed to effecting social change, and develop stronger leadership skills.

Bok, Our Underachieving Colleges, 2006
One Simple Model of Civic Engagement

Define and Articulate Civic Outcomes

Design Experiences Throughout the Institution That Address the Outcomes

First Year, General Education, Capstone Courses, Majors, Student Organizations, Residence Halls, Experiences On and Off Campus

Measure Outcomes
“The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment.”

Robert Hutchins
400 Public Colleges and Universities
Delivering America's Promise

American Association of State Colleges And Universities