Developing Civic Engagement Skills on College Campuses: A Multi-Campus Assessment

Program presented at the 2010 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis
October 2010

Allison BrckaLorenz
Yesenia Cervera
Amy Garver
Shimon Sarraf

NSSE
national survey of
student engagement

Purpose

- To assess the level of college student
  - involvement in various civic engagement (CE) developmental activities; and
  - perceptions of institutional emphasis on CE related outcomes
- To learn from workshop attendees
  - What are you doing on your campuses?
  - How would you improve upon our measures?

Agenda

- Interactive Conversation: What is your campus doing?
- Civic Engagement: Definition, history and developmental activities
- Study Results
- Interactive Conversation: How can we enhance these measures?

A Few Words About NSSE…

- NSSE gives a snapshot of student experiences in and outside of the classroom at four year colleges and universities—focus on behaviors (some perceptions)

- NSSE survey items represent good practices related to desirable college outcomes

- Indirect, process measures of student learning and development

---

What does Civic Engagement look like on your campus?

- What does Civic Engagement look like on your campus?

- How important is developing civic engagement skills on your campus?

- What kinds of activities are available to promote civic engagement?

- Which civic engagement activities are most/least popular among students?

What is Civic Engagement?

"Civic engagement means 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. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."

Thomas Ehrlich, 2000

Civic Engagement and Higher Education

- Fostering civic engagement has been a purpose of higher education since the very creation of colleges and universities (Smith, 1994)
- Recent decades have witnessed declines in civic engagement (Galston, 2007; Sax, 2004) , despite increases in postsecondary enrollment (Kinzie et al., 2004; Geiger, 2005)
- Higher education has responded to this growing concern (Nishishiba, 2005)
- Current definitions of civic engagement are more broadly based on community life (Checkoway, 2001; Ehrlich, 2000; Jacoby, 2009; Sax, 2004)

Developing Civic Engagement Skills, Values, and Knowledge during College

- Interactions with Diversity (Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Nishishiba, 2005; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini, 1996)

- Service Learning (Checkoway, 2001; Nishishiba, 2005; O'Conner, 2005)

- Volunteering (Astin, Sax, Avalos, 1999; Rhoads, 1998; Sax, 2004)

- Group Leadership (Astin et al., 2000; Foubert and Grainger, 2006; Hernandez, 1999)

- Political Skills/Attitudes (Hillygus, 2005)

- Campus Climate (Checkoway, 2001; Kuh and Umbach, 2004)

Research Questions

- What is the level of undergraduate student involvement in activities related to developing civic engagement skills?
- To what extent do campuses emphasize an environment for developing civic engagement skills?

Research Questions

How do student characteristics relate to civic engagement development activities?
- Gender
- Greek status
- On-campus residence
- Underrepresented minority status
- Part-time enrollment
- Academic major category (senior only)

Data

- 2010 NSSE and 2010 Civic Engagement items
- Study population
  - ~9,000 first years
  - ~12,000 seniors
  - 39 four-year institutions

NSSE's Civic Engagement Constructs

Existing items
- Diverse interactions and perspectives
- Service learning and volunteering
New items:
- Involvement in campus dialog
- Political skills development
- Institutional emphasis on civic engagement education
  - *Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta (2006)

Civic Engagement NSSE Items

- **Have you done?** (*Done*, *Plan To Do*, *Do Not Plan To Do*, *Undecided*)
  - Run for an elected student leadership position
- **How often have you done?** (*Never*, *Sometimes*, *Often*, *Very Often*)
  - Supported a political or social cause by organizing, petitioning, or protesting
- **Does your institution emphasize?** (*Very Little*, *Some*, *Quite a Bit*, *Very Much*)
  - Being aware of global, political, or social issues

Civic Engagement NSSE Items

- Individual items
  - **Have you done?** (*Done*, *Plan To Do*, *Do Not Plan To Do*, *Undecided*)
- Scales
  - Political Skills Development (α = .76)
  - Campus Dialogue Experience (α = .86)
  - Campus Emphasis on Civic Engagement (α = .90)

NSSE Results

Percent of students reporting having "done" the activity	(FY%/SR%)
Community service or volunteer work	**39% / 58%**

How often have students done the following activity 1=Never, 2= Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Often	FY/SR
Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course	**1.6 / 1.7**
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	**2.6 / 2.7**
Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	**2.7**

To what extent does your institution emphasize the following: 1=Very Little, 2=Some, 3=Quite a Bit, 4=Very Much	FY/SR
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	**2.8 / 2.6**

NSSE Results: Percent Done

Percent of students reporting having "done" the activity	(FY%/SR%)
Run for an elected student leadership position	**6% / 16%**
Volunteer to work on a political issue or campaign	**3% / 8%**
Manage or provide leadership for a university/college club or organization	**6% / 24%**

NSSE Results: How Often

Political Skills Development

How often have students done the following activity 1=Never, 2= Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Often	FY/SR
Attended a speech about political or social issues that was NOT a part of a class assignment	**1.6**
Supported a political or social cause by organizing, petitioning, or protesting	**1.4**
Contributed to a political blog or other electronic form of political action *	**1.3/1.2**
Learned more about how local, state or national government functions through coursework	**1.7**
Refused to buy a product because of the policies of the company that produced it	**1.6/1.7**

NSSE Results: How Often

Campus Dialogue Experience

How often have students done the following activity 1=Never, 2= Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Often	FY/SR
Attended a meeting where students discussed campus issues or policies among themselves	**1.6/1.5**
Proposed ideas at a meeting where students discussed campus issues or policies among themselves	**1.4**
Attended a meeting where administrators or faculty discussed campus issues or policies with students	**1.4**

NSSE Results: Institution Emphasis

Campus Emphasis on Civic Engagement

To what extent does your institution emphasize the following: 1=Very Little, 2=Some, 3=Quite a Bit, 4=Very Much	FY/SR
Resolving controversies with civility	2.5
Being aware of global, political, or social issues	2.8/2.7
Weighing the pros and cons of different positions on political or social issues *	2.5/2.4
Developing strategies for political or social action *	2.3/2.2
Organizing people for political or social action *	2.2/2.0

Research Questions

How do student characteristics relate to civic engagement development activities?
– Gender
– Greek status
– On-campus residence
– Underrepresented minority status
– Part-time enrollment
– Academic major category (senior only)

	Political skills development	Campus dialogue	Campus emphasis on CE	Leadership Experience	Diverse interactions	Volunteering	Service Learning
Female	-	-				+	- / +
Minority	+	+			+		+
Part-time enrollment	-	-	-	-	/ -	+	-
On-campus resident	+ /	+		+ +		+	+
Greek member	+	+ +	+	+ + +	+	+ + +	+ +
Arts & Humanities	+	+			+	-	
Education	-			-		+ +	+ + +
Social Sciences	+ +	+	+		+	+	+
Biological Sciences					+	+ +	+
Physical Sciences	-	-	- -		-	+	-
Engineering	-		- -	+		+	-
Professional					+	+	+ + +
Other Professional						+	+

Academic major field (*seniors only; Business as reference group*)

Political Skills Development

Positive Relationships
• Minority
• On-campus
• Greek
• Arts & Humanities
• Social Sciences

Negative Relationships
• Female
• Part-time
• Education
• Physical Sciences
• Engineering

Campus Dialogue Experience

Positive Relationships
• Minority
• On-campus (first years)
• Greek
• Arts & Humanities
• Social Sciences

Negative Relationships
• Female
• Part-time
• Physical Sciences

Campus Emphasis on CE

Positive Relationships
• Greek
• Social Sciences

Negative Relationships
• Part-time
• Physical Sciences
• Engineering

Leadership Experience

Positive Relationships
- On-campus (first years)
- Greek
- Engineering

Negative Relationships
- Part-time
- Education

Diverse Interactions

Positive Relationships
- Minority
- On-campus
- Greek
- Arts & Humanities
- Social Sciences
- Biological Sciences
- Professional

Negative Relationships
- Part-time (senior)
- Physical Sciences

Volunteering

Positive Relationships
- Female
- Part-time
- On-campus
- Greek
- All major categories except for one

Negative Relationships
- Arts & Humanities

Service Learning

Positive Relationships
- Female (senior)
- Minority
- On-campus (first years)
- Greek
- Education
- Social Sciences
- Biological Sciences
- Professional
- Other Professional

Negative Relationships
- Female (first year)
- Part-time enrollment
- Physical Sciences
- Engineering

Characteristics Across Outcomes

Positive Relationships
- On-campus
- Greek
- Social Sciences

Negative Relationships
- Part-time enrollment
- Physical Sciences

Discussion

- What did we learn?
- To what extent do our findings reflect civic engagement on your campus?
- How can we improve our measures?
  - Are there missing components in our conception of civic engagement?
  - What other kinds of activities promote CE skills?
  - What items do you find the least or most useful when assessing CE on your campus?

Thank you!

Allison BrckaLorenz - abrckalo@indiana.edu
Yesenia Cervera - ycervera@indiana.edu
Amy Garver - agarver@indiana.edu
Shimon Sarraf - ssarraf@indiana.edu

For a copy of this presentation, go to:
http://nsse.iub.edu/html/pubs.cfm

NSSE
national survey of
student engagement