

3. When budgetary challenges at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* caused it to pull out of the project before the survey was fielded, we successfully acquired internal funding to administer the survey so that our work creating the survey instrument would not be for naught.
4. R1, baccalaureate colleges, and R3 are Carnegie classifications that refer to different types of academic institutions.

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CONCLUSION: WHAT WE LEARNED AND THE PATH FORWARD

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DOI:10.1017/S1049096521001736

The contributions to this Spotlight describe a remarkably broad spectrum of activities and initiatives aimed at fostering civic engagement among college students. These contributions also offer an array of practical examples and "lessons learned" that inevitably will prove to be of immense value for other political scientists as they explore and develop civic engagement programming ideas of their own.

The Benefits of Civic Engagement Activities

Although the activities described in these Spotlight articles vary widely, they collectively point to a set of positive outcomes that can be derived from well-planned civic engagement activities in higher education. Foremost among these benefits are the enhancement of student learning, the fostering of community building (both on- and off-campus), and the promotion of democratic principles and practices.

A decade ago, Archer and Miller (2011) documented the clear benefits of active-learning pedagogies for political science. The contributions to this Spotlight that focus on credit-bearing courses likewise demonstrate the benefits of civic engagement activities for student learning. Similarly, the Spotlight contributors also make clear the value of civic engagement activities in fostering stronger community bonds. Each civic engagement activity described in these articles insists that students view themselves as part of the broader public. Even something as simple as having a conversation with other students on campus, who otherwise might not encounter one another, or participating

in activities that include students from other campuses builds community and contributes to a sense of shared purpose.

Perhaps most important, we know that providing students with meaningful opportunities to observe and participate directly in politics while they are in college can have a powerful influence on their future level of political engagement—as well as their appreciation of the democratic norms of equality, tolerance, fair play, and the rule of law. Participating in voter registration and mobilization efforts necessarily requires students to confront questions about who votes, who does not, and the impediments to democratic participation. When resources permit, more robust civic engagement activities such as extended work on presidential campaigns fully immerse students in the democratic process.

The Challenges of Implementing Civic Engagement Activities

Whereas the contributors to this Spotlight make clear the benefits of adding civic engagement activities to classroom and co-curricular offerings, they also—both separately and together—highlight several challenges to doing so effectively. Two of the main challenges are limited resources and limited institutional support.

Limited Resources

Several projects described in this Spotlight required little or no direct financial support from their home institution. This may be encouraging—after all, many faculty members must work within tight financial constraints—and effective civic engagement teaching can take place even in the absence of dedicated budgets or significant grant support. At the same time, these contributions also make clear that significant faculty time and energy are needed to make even many putatively "free" activities work. Faculty members who opt for such a path should have a clear-eyed view from the outset of both the significant personal costs that it can entail and the relative lack of professional "credit" for the work that may ensue.

Limited Institutional Support

To expand on the previous point, each project described here depended almost entirely on the authors' individual commitment to doing the work—despite the lack of any tangible incentives for doing so. In this context, promotion and tenure calculations have a significant role; indeed, many institutions count civic engagement activity only as campus or community service rather than as part of their teaching or research missions—a categorization that may render it essentially irrelevant for purposes of professional advancement. Moreover, colleges and universities often have no established mechanism through which faculty members can obtain supplementary salary, "seed money," or project funding for civic engagement ideas under development. To be sure, American colleges and universities commonly cite their civic responsibilities in their charters and mission statements—and some even explicitly embed the teaching of civic knowledge and practice in their curricula. Nevertheless, the incentives and supports available for civically-engaged faculty in many institutional settings remain limited at best.

The Path Forward

The lessons about benefits and challenges described in this concluding article likely will be helpful touchstones for faculty

members who are seeking to incorporate civic engagement activities in classroom or co-curricular activities. We think that the following four additional considerations arise from the work presented here:

1. *Equity and Inclusion.* Even the “free” activities described here and underway on campuses across the country present equity concerns that must be considered. As Levin-Waldman (2012) noted, students’ civic engagement activities in college are tied to their economic status. Simply stated, if students must work, have family responsibilities, or lack access to reliable transportation, they may find it impossible to participate in even the most engaging and enriching off-campus or off-hours events. Similarly, students in residential campus settings may find it much easier in practice to access on-campus civics programming than their peers who commute from home or take online

“credible” for reappointment, promotion, and tenure. Moreover, we note that assessment of these efforts should take place even when they are undertaken by nonacademic units.

4. *The Role of Higher Education in Promoting Civic Engagement.* Close readers of these Spotlight articles may notice that only one R1 institution is represented among the contributors. However, by no means does that suggest that this type of work is uniquely the province of liberal arts colleges, regional universities, and community colleges. To the contrary, *all* institutions of higher education ultimately share in the responsibility of teaching our future leaders about democracy and good citizenship (National Council for the Social Studies 2016). Scholars have long recognized that students’ experiences in higher education generally have significant effects on their subsequent level of civic engagement (Straugh and Andriot 2011). As political scientists, we all must do more—irrespective

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courses. If civic learning and engagement are key drivers of several important student-learning and societal outcomes, then it is incumbent on everyone who plans, implements, and assesses civic engagement programming on our campuses to find ways to expand the availability of these opportunities for *all* students and to lower the financial and other practical barriers to active participation.

2. *Campus Partnerships.* Identifying campus and community partners can be essential to successful civic engagement activities. Political scientists are not the only people on college and university campuses who are engaged in civic engagement work. As many of the contributions to this Spotlight point out, there are myriad other academic departments and student activities offices where campus partnerships might be cultivated. Yet, limited institutional support can make it a challenge to locate and sustain these partnerships. New and junior faculty members in particular may need assistance with locating partners both on- and off-campus and with identifying activities that will be supported by their colleagues and administrators as they progress through the tenure and promotion processes at their institution.

3. *Assessment.* We suspect that many faculty members who are seeking additional institutional support for civic engagement work may be hindered by the lack of rigorous assessment of their existing efforts. Yet, making a successful case for institutional or external support often depends on being able to document the ways in which predefined learning objectives have been or will be met. We believe that greater attention to assessing student learning in civic engagement also will assist faculty as they seek to make their civic engagement work

of our institutional position—to ensure that students have the experiences and opportunities necessary so that our institutions serve their traditional Deweyan role as incubators of active democratic citizens.

Conclusion

Concerns about America’s “civic health” are hardly new. Indeed, scholars in a range of fields have documented declines in community and civic connectedness for decades. The activities described by the Spotlight’s contributors are only snapshots of the full range of civic engagement activities taking place in classrooms and on campuses around the nation. Yet, they provide useful examples of how political scientists can contribute to their students’ learning—and to the public good—through their civic engagement work as teachers and as scholars. They also provide valuable encouragement and food for thought for those who may be considering how they can leverage their resources, interests, and ideas to create a high-impact civic engagement program on their own campus. ■

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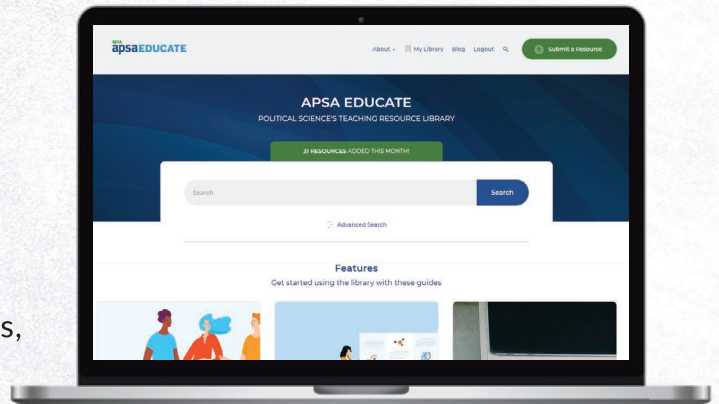
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