

## Volunteering and College Experience<sup>1</sup>

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This fact sheet presents evidence from the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) and several other data sources to demonstrate that young people without college experience (**43 percent of the 20-29 year old population**) are less engaged in volunteering than their college counterparts. Indeed, youth with college experience are more than twice as likely to volunteer their time as youth without any college experience. We draw upon previous research by J. Foster-Bey that also found that high levels of education predict high levels of formal volunteering.<sup>3</sup>

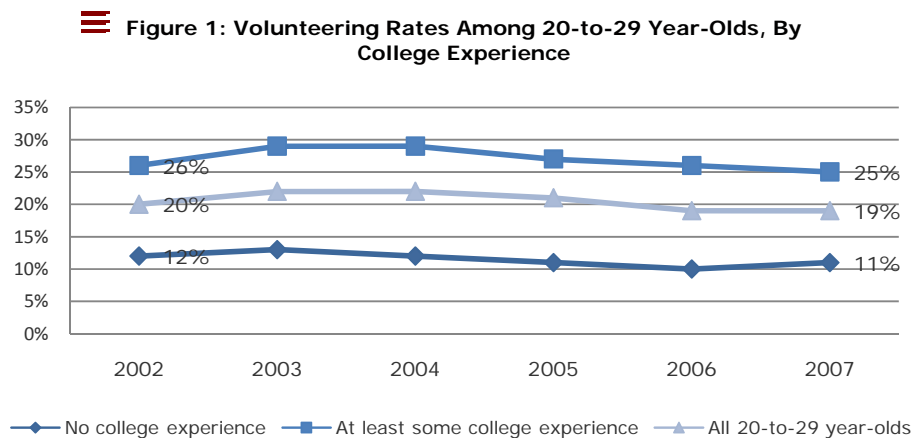
Inequality in volunteering is a matter of concern because volunteering provides many benefits to those who serve. A dramatic example is the finding that belonging to voluntary associations in Chicago is associated with lower death rates, especially for African American men.<sup>4</sup>

Volunteering is one form of civic engagement; other forms include voting, belonging to voluntary groups, attentiveness to the news, and collaborating with other people on public issues. Overall, young Americans today are less engaged in some aspects of civic life than young people were in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Volunteering is an exception in that it has become more common for young Americans since the 1970s. But college-educated young people are still much more involved than their peers with no college experience. When compared to their counterparts with at least some college experience, youth with no college experience report lower rates of civic engagement beyond volunteering. For example, CPS data show that youth with no college experience are less likely to engage in community projects and attend public meetings than their counterparts with college experience.<sup>6</sup> The former group has had very low voter turnout rates in every midterm and presidential election since 1972.<sup>7</sup>

The fact sheet shows that religious organizations and relatives may represent important pathways for non-college youth to become engaged in volunteer service. Furthermore, the fact sheet presents data suggesting that new media (text messaging, email, social networking sites like Facebook, etc.) may be another important avenue for increasing volunteering among non-college youth. However, more research is needed on the link between new media and civic engagement. Additionally, the fact sheet provides basic demographic information about non-college volunteers to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of this population. The research shows that non-college women volunteer at higher rates than their male counterparts and African American and Latino youth with no

college experience are the least likely demographic to volunteer.

About one quarter of young adults who have attended college reported volunteering in 2007. That rate has declined somewhat from 2003 to 2004. Only about one in 10 young people who have never attended college reported volunteering— also a somewhat lower rate than in 2003-2004. The difference in volunteering rates between these two groups has remained about the same since 2002, when the Census began regular volunteering surveys. DDB Life Style Surveys conducted annually from the 1970s through 2005 show a consistent (although smaller) gap between these two groups— an average of eight percentage points in the 2000s and 10 percentage points in the 1970s. Findings from the two datasets suggest that the gap in volunteer participation between college and non-college youth has remained unchanged over time.



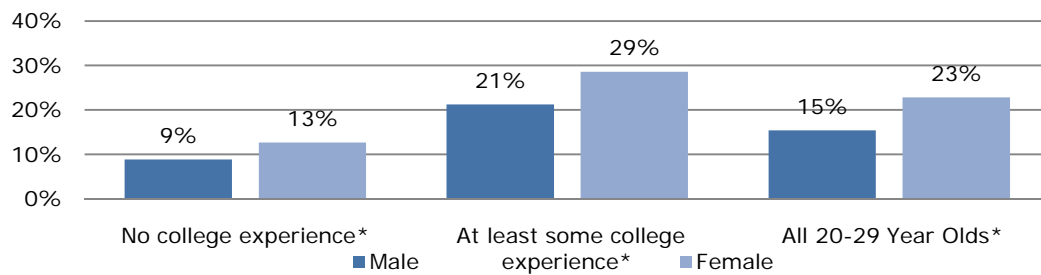
Source: CPS Sept. Supplements 2002-2007

In 2007, 43 percent of 20-to-29 year-olds had no college experience. The proportion who did not attend college has not changed much since 1975, although it did rise in the 1960s. Post-secondary institutions often offer volunteering opportunities or encourage such behavior, which partly explains the difference in volunteer rates shown in Figure 1. For example, the more than one thousand college and university presidents who belong to Campus Compact are committed to providing service opportunities in classes and extracurricular organizations on their campuses. Therefore, increasing access to college is one way to improve civic engagement among young Americans. But college may not be for everyone. It is also important to invest in high-quality civic opportunities for youth of high-school age and to consider opportunities for young adults who do not attend college. That is especially important now that other institutions that once recruited working-class youth, such as unions and religious congregations, have shrunk in membership.<sup>8</sup>

### *Non-College Women Volunteer at Higher Rates than Non-College Men*

Young women volunteer (and vote) at higher rates than do young men.<sup>9</sup> Women volunteer at a rate of 23% compared to 15% among men (ages 20 to 29). The gap between the sexes is larger among those with some college experience (about seven percentage points), but it is smaller among those with no college experience (less than four percentage points).

**Figure 2: Volunteering Rates Among Men and Women by College Experience**



**CPS September Supplement, 2007**

\* The gender differences in volunteering rates are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  level for all subgroups.

### *African American and Latino Youth with No College Experience Are the Least Likely to Volunteer*

American Indians have some of the highest volunteer rates among 20-to-29 year-olds (see Table 1). Volunteer rates vary among racial and ethnic categories, but African Americans and Latinos are the least likely to volunteer, regardless of college experience. Whites with some college experience have the highest volunteering rate among all racial and ethnic groups (28 percent); African Americans and Latinos with no college experience have the lowest—seven percent.

**Table 1: Volunteer Rates Among 20-to-29 year-olds by College Experience and Race and Ethnicity**

	White*	Black*	Hispanic*	Asian	American Indian
All 20-to-29 year-olds	23%	13%	10%	16%	23%
No College Experience	14%	7%	7%	14%	***
Some College Experience	28%	19%	17%	17%	***

Source: Author's tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement, 2007.

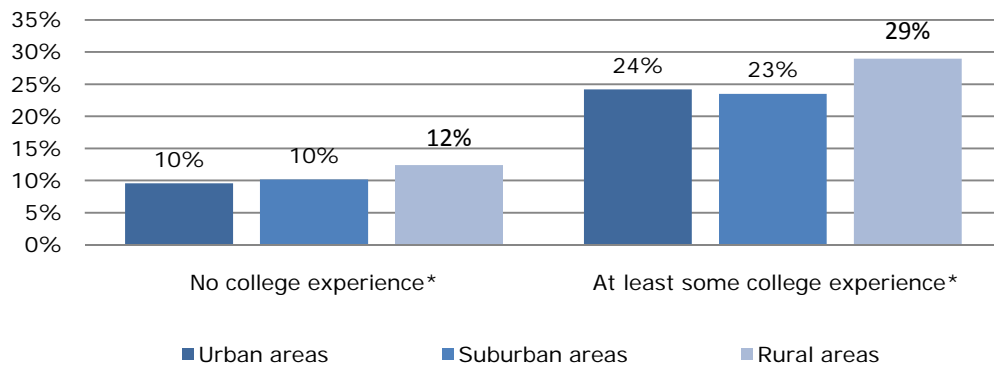
\*Differences in volunteering rates between youth with and without college experience are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  level.

\*\*\*Sample size is too small for sub-group analysis.

### *Young People in Rural Areas Volunteer at Slightly Higher Rates*

Consistent with the general trend in volunteering, American youth who lived in rural areas have slightly higher rates of volunteering, regardless of college education (see Figure 3).<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 3: Volunteering Rates by Urbanicity and Education (Ages 20 to 29)**



Source: Author's tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement, 2007.  
 \*Differences in volunteering rates between youth with and without college students are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  level.

### *Religious Organizations Draw Non-College Youth*

American youth volunteer for a host of organizations, ranging from “religious” groups to “labor unions, business, or professional” associations to “immigrant/refugee assistance” organizations. Table 3 lists the top three types of organizations where young people volunteer. When asked which type of organization was their main site of volunteering, 37 percent of youth with no college experience and 33 percent of those with college experience reported “religious” organizations—the top choice for both. Youth with no college experience were slightly more likely to name a “children’s educational, sports or recreational” organization as their main volunteer site than those with college experience.

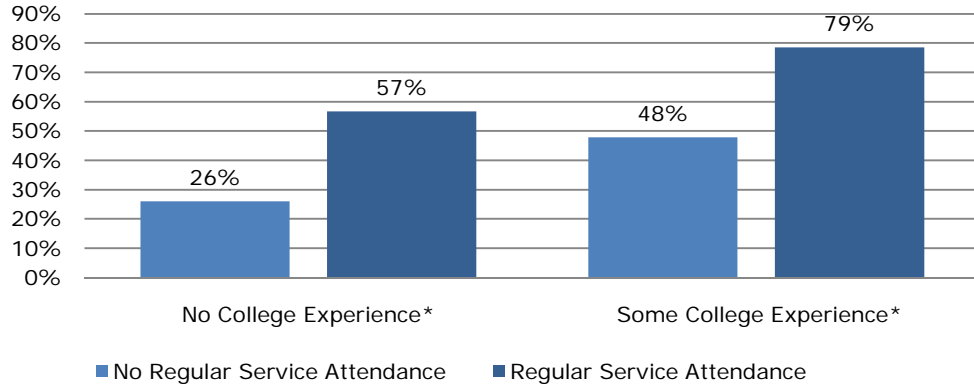
**Table 3: Type of Volunteer Organization (Among 20-to-29 Years-Old Volunteers) by Education**

	No College Experience	Some College Experience
Religious	37%	33%
Children's educational, sports, or recreational	27%	21%
Social and community service	16%	20%

Source: Author's tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement, 2007.

As shown in Table 3, youth with no college experience are most likely to volunteer at religious organizations. Another source of data, *America’s Civic Health Index*, provides complementary information. As seen in Figure 4, youth with no college experience who attend religious services at least once a month are more than twice as likely to volunteer than their peers who did not attend services regularly (no more than a few times a year). Although service attendance is associated with a significantly higher rate of volunteering among youth with college experience, ties to religious organizations appear to be a more important avenue to volunteering among youth with no college experience. Looking at non-college youth, those who attend religious services are twice as likely to volunteer as those who do not attend services regularly. However, looking at youth with some college experience, the religious effect is smaller. One possible explanation is that those with college experience are made aware of alternative venues for volunteering beyond religious organizations, whereas those who have no college experience are not made aware of those same opportunities.

≡ **Figure 4: Volunteering and Religious Service by College Attendance (Ages 18 to 29)**



Source: Author’s tabulations of the America’s Civic Health Index, 2008. For this Figure, the age grouping is 18 to 29 due to the way information about age was collected in the Civic Health Index. Also, please note that this data source had a higher baseline volunteering rate than Census data.

Note: \* denotes statistically significant difference in volunteering rates between youth who did and did not attend religious services at least once a month. The difference between youth with no college experience and youth with some college experience remain significant regardless of whether they attend religious services or not.

When asked about the type of volunteer activity that young people *spend most of their time doing*, young Americans regardless of college experience are most likely to say they spend most of their time on mentoring youth and teaching/tutoring, although youth with college experience were more likely to report spending most of their time on tutoring than youth without college experience. Youth with college experience were also slightly more likely to say they spent most of their time on providing professional or management assistance. (See Table 4.)

**Table 4: Activity Young Volunteers (20-to-29 Years-Old) Spent Most Time On, by Education**

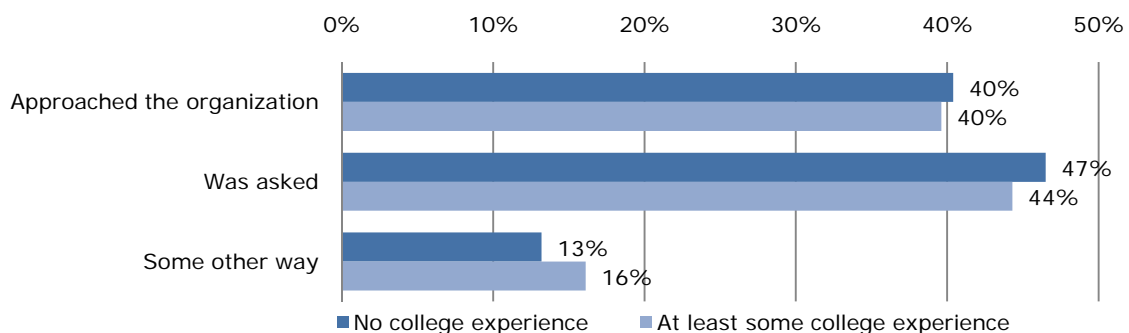
	No College Experience	Some College Experience
Equal time among all	26%	19%
Tutor or teach	10%	14%
Mentor youth	9%	10%
Engage in music, performance, or other artistic activities	8%	6%
Fundraise or sell items to raise money	8%	8%
Collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food	8%	6%
Engage in general labor; supply transportation for people	7%	7%
Other (specify)	6%	4%
Coach, referee, or supervise	5%	7%
Be an usher, greeter, or minister	4%	3%
Provide general office services	3%	4%
Provide professional or management assistance including serving on a board or committee	3%	7%
Collect, make or distribute clothing, crafts, or goods other than food	2%	2%
Provide counseling, medical care, Fire/EMS or other protective services	2%	2%

Source: Author's tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement, 2007. Percentages do not add up to 100 percent because some did not answer this question.

***Youth Without College Experience Respond to Invitations by Family Members to Volunteer***

More than eight in 10 volunteers become involved with an organization by approaching the organization or being asked to become involved. See Figure 4. While there is little difference within college experience, the main distinction is between who is doing the asking.

**Figure 4: How Volunteers, ages 20 to 29, Become Involved with an Organization, by Education**



Source: Author's tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement 2007

Among the youth who reported being asked to volunteer, youth with and without college experience differed on who asked them to volunteer. Table 5 shows the top three persons responsible for asking a volunteer to get involved. Among those who were asked to volunteer, most reported being

contacted by “someone in the organization.” Youth with no college experience were more likely to be asked by a relative.

**Table 5: Who Asked You to Become a Volunteer, by Education Ages 20 to 29**

	No College Experience	Some College Experience
Someone in the organization	50%	52%
Relative	21%	14%
Friend	12%	19%

Source: Author’s tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement, 2007.

Notes: The data only apply to those who said that someone asked to become involved in the previous question.

Among the youth who became involved with a volunteering organization in “some other way” (i.e., did not approach the organization themselves and no one asked them to be involved – see Figure 4), some differences were observed. Youth with college experience were most likely to have started volunteering through their pre-existing connection with their main volunteering organization (33%). On the other hand, youth without college experience were most likely to have started volunteering through their relative’s connection to the organization (29%). See Table 6.

**Table 6: Alternative Ways to Get Involved Among 20-to-29 Year-Old Volunteers**

	No College Experience	Some College Experience
Family member's involvement in the organization/school	29%	18%
Own involvement in the organization/school	21%	33%
Friend's, co-worker's, or roommate's involvement in the organization	10%	11%

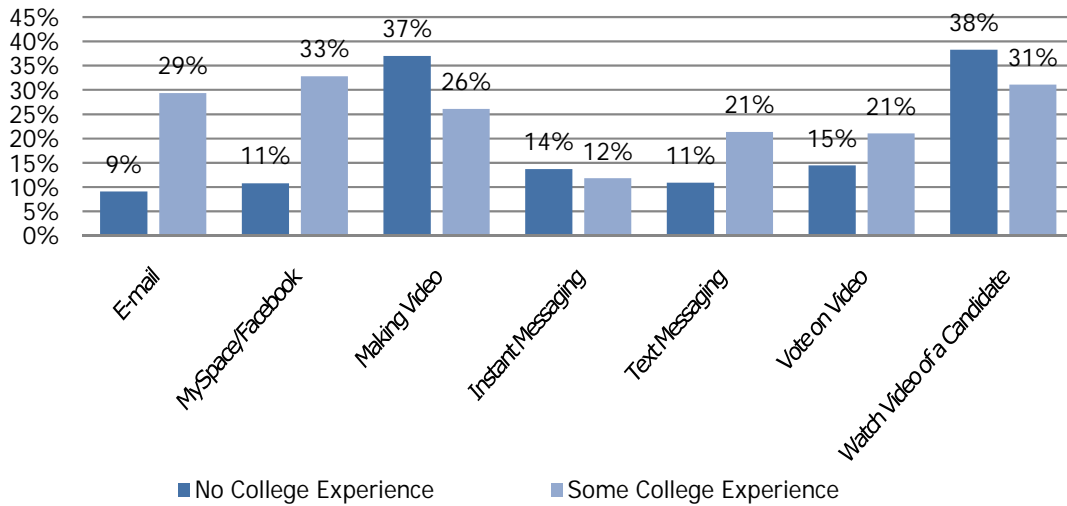
Source: Author’s tabulations of the Current Population Survey, September Supplement, 2007.

Notes: The data only apply to those who responded that they became involved with a volunteering organization in ways other than approaching the organization themselves or being asked by someone.

### ***Social Media: A Possible Pathway to Volunteering***

New media, such as email, social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook), Youtube, and text messaging represent possible avenues for youth with no college experience to participate. For example, new media were widely utilized in 2008 to promote voting and political involvement among young people. But is it true for volunteering? Data show that young people who used new forms of media for civic purposes tended to volunteer at higher rate than those who did not. This was true for youth with no college experience and youth with college experience. As shown in Figure 5, non-college youth who used various types of media were 10 to almost 40 percent more likely to volunteer than non-college youth who did not. The data should be interpreted with caution, as use of new media is also likely to be associated with other factors that are related to volunteering (such as income and general levels of civic engagement other than volunteering). However, it is possible that new media are breaking down barriers to volunteering, such as a lack of information and opportunity by helping youth with no college experience find information related to volunteering opportunities throughout the country. Future research could explore how young people become connected to volunteering opportunities through these tools in depth.

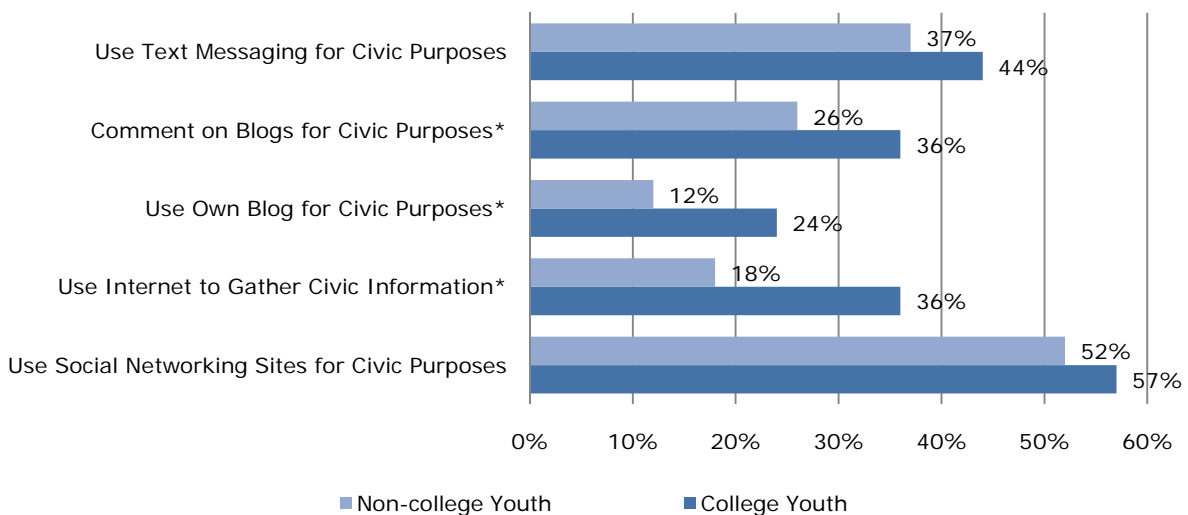
**Figure 5: Percent Increase in Volunteering Associated with Media Use**



Source: Author's tabulations of the America's Civic Health Index, 2008. Percentage point s represent the increase in the rates of volunteering associated with use of each type of media.

At the same time, online forms of civic engagement (such as commenting on a blog for civic purposes) are still less common among youth without college experience than youth with some college experience. As seen in Figure 6, youth without college experience were less likely to use new media technology to express opinions about political, social or community issues although the gaps were smaller on some types of technology. Youth without college experience are using various forms of new media (text messaging and social networking) at similar rates as their peers with college experience, and a substantial portion of youth without college experience (52%) now use social networking sites for civic purposes. ("Civic purposes" is defined as using the technology to gather information about politics or a social issue or a community problem.)

**Figure 6: Online Tools Used for Civic Purposes, Ages 18-29**



Source: Author's tabulations of the America's Civic Health Index, 2008

Note: The bars denoted with \* indicate statistically significant group difference at  $p < .05$  level.<sup>11</sup>



## Conclusion

Young people without college education (nearly half of the youth population) are under-represented in formal volunteer activities. Furthermore, the gap in volunteering rates between college and non-college youth has remained relatively unchanged since the 1970s. This fact sheet shows that religious organizations, relatives and social media may present opportunities for engaging more young people without college experience in formal volunteering.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> *This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service under Agreement No. 08BIHMA001. Unless otherwise stated, opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, the Corporation.*
- <sup>2</sup> Senior Researcher, Research Associate, and Lead Researcher, at CIRCLE. We thank Peter Levine and Surhbi M. Godsay of CIRCLE for helpful comments and technical assistance on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.
- <sup>3</sup> See CIRCLE Working Paper #62 "Do Race, Ethnicity, Citizenship, and Socio-Economic Status Determine Civic Engagement?" by J. Foster-Bey (December 2008)  
[http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP62\\_Foster.Bey.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP62_Foster.Bey.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> Kimberly A. Lochner, Ichiro Kawachi, Robert T. Brennan and Stephen L. Bukac, "Social Capital and Neighborhood Mortality Rates in Chicago," *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 56, issue 8, pp. 1797-1805 (April 2003).
- <sup>5</sup> Constance Flanagan, Peter Levine, and Richard Settersten (2009). *Civic Engagement and the Changing Transition to Adulthood*. A CIRCLE/Spencer Foundation Paper. Available at:  
<http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/ChangingTransition.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> See CIRCLE Working Paper #62 "Do Race, Ethnicity, Citizenship, and Socio-Economic Status Determine Civic Engagement?" by J. Foster-Bey (December 2008). For example, 5.4% of college youth reported they had attended a "Public Meeting" in the last year compared to 1.6% of non-college youth. And 4.7% of youth with college experience reported that they had "Worked with people in neighborhood to fix a problem/condition" compared to 2.1% non-college youth
- <sup>7</sup> See CIRCLE Fact Sheets "*Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Election*" (November 2008) and "*Electoral Engagement Among Non-College Attending Youth*" (July 2005).
- <sup>8</sup> See Flanagan et al.
- <sup>9</sup> See CIRCLE Fact Sheet "*Civic Engagement Among Young Men and Women*" (March 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> See [www.volunteeringinamerica.gov](http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov) for more information on factors related to volunteering rates.
- <sup>11</sup> Group comparisons from Figure 3 and Figure 8 should be interpreted with caution, because the sample size for non-college youth in America's Civic Health Index was smaller (n < 100) and percentage estimates have relatively larger error.