

## YOUTH SPORTS: A BOOST FOR DEMOCRACY?

**Y**oung people who are involved in sports report higher levels of voting, volunteering and engagement in their community than those who do not participate, according to a new CIRCLE Fact Sheet. The Fact Sheet, "Participation in Sports and Civic Engagement" by Mark Hugo Lopez and Kimberlee Moore, offers a detailed look at the role sports play in the civic development of 18-25-year-olds. The data show that young people who participated in sports activities during their high school years were more likely than non-sports participants to have:

- volunteered (32 percent vs. 21 percent),
- registered to vote (58 percent vs. 40 percent),
- voted (44 percent vs. 33 percent in 2000), and
- followed news closely (41 percent vs. 26 percent).

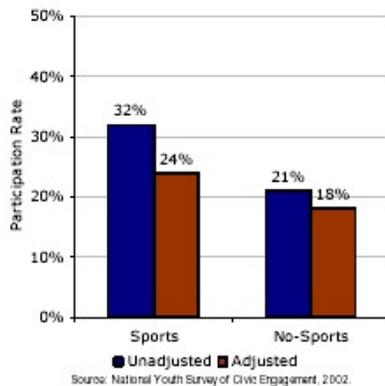
*"Although there are problems with big-time sports today, high school and college athletics still prepare young people for active and responsible citizenship," said Hon. Tom McMillen, valedictorian of the University of Maryland class of 1974, Rhodes Scholar, NBA player, and former Member of Congress.*

"Although there are problems with big-time sports today, high school and college athletics still prepare young people for active and responsible citizenship," said Hon. Tom McMillen, valedictorian of the University of Maryland class of 1974, Rhodes Scholar, NBA player, and former Member of Congress.

### RELATIONSHIP HOLDS EVEN WHEN CONTROLLING FOR OTHER FACTORS

"We considered that people who choose to participate in sports may also tend to choose to participate in politics and civic affairs, and sports may not be the reason for their civic engagement," said Lopez,

**Graph 1: Sports Participation and Volunteering; Unadjusted and Adjusted Rates, 18-25 Year Olds, 2002.**



**Graph 1 Note:** Adjusted percentages are predicted probabilities based on a model that controls for gender, race/ethnicity, age, marital status, educational attainment, other high school activity involvement, work status, income status, region, MSA status, college student status, number of kids in household, household size, internet use, household head status, and rent status. This model was estimated for 18-25 year olds. All results are weighted.

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**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement

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research director at CIRCLE and the study's lead author. "However, the relationship between sports and civic engagement remains even when we statistically control for other factors like gender, race/ethnicity, income, other high school activities, region and educational attainment. That result suggests that sports have positive civic effects for many young people."

While some of the relationship between sports participation and civic engagement is driven by other factors (race, gender, etc.), young people who have participated in sports are indeed more engaged in some civic activities once these observable factors are controlled. For instance, even after controlling for these factors, the study finds:

- Volunteering rates were higher for sports youth: 24 percent of participants volunteer versus 18 percent of non-participants.
- Young people involved in sports in high school were more likely to be registered to vote and vote in the 2000 election than non-sports youth: 60 percent vs. 44 percent were registered and 43 percent vs. 33 percent voted.
- Youth who participated in sports were more likely to say they watched the news than their non-sports counterparts: 41 percent vs. 27 percent.

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According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, the number of students involved in high school sports has steadily increased over the past sixteen years. In the 2004-2005 school year, approximately 7 million high school students participated in athletic programs, up from 5.3 million in 1990. In 2002, about 42 percent of youth 18-25 had participated in organized sports during high school.

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**CIRCLE** (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 and is funded predominantly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

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## RELATED REPORT REVEALS GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE, CONFLICTING FINDINGS

A new CIRCLE Literature Review, "Sports, Youth and Character: A Critical Survey," which looks at the effects of participation on youth from age 4 to 18, finds conflicting analyses and a dearth of reliable, data-driven research on the role sports play in character development. For one thing, until the 1990s, researchers have lacked rich longitudinal, representative data sets to analyze for effects on youth development—healthy or unhealthy—of sports participation.

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*"That sports builds character is a widespread belief in our society," said Robert K. Fullinwider, research scholar at the University of Maryland's Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy, and the author of this review of sports research, "but the scholarly literature paints a mixed and incomplete picture. We need better-grounded research than we currently possess."*

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"So many reports of young people and sports highlight the negative—pushy parents; steroid use, cheating and excessive aggressiveness to get ahead; and even high levels of suicide among youth athletes," said Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE. "These two new studies suggest a more complicated and nuanced picture of the role sports play in the character and civic development of

young Americans."

The studies surveyed by "Sports, Youth, and Character" point to some links between sports and positive outcomes like higher levels of college attendance, girls' increased interest and success in math and science, better school attendance, fewer drop-outs, more parental involvement and better grades. However, these outcomes are not direct measures of character, and questions still remain about the role that sports have in leading young people to play fair, persevere and show leadership skills, for example.

"That sports builds character is a widespread belief in our society," said Robert K. Fullinwider, research scholar at the University of Maryland's Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy, and the author of this review of sports research, "but the scholarly literature paints a mixed and incomplete picture. We need better-grounded research than we currently possess."

Both reports can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site at [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/group\\_membership.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/group_membership.htm). ■

## CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

CIRCLE has produced thirty-six Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:

- ≡ **The New Face of America's Social-Issues Voters:** Examines the role that "moral values" played in the 2004 youth vote. Based on the National Election Pool national exit poll, 23 percent of voters age 18-24 ranked "moral values" as their top issue influencing their voting preference.
- ≡ **The Effects of Civic Education on Civic Skills:** Reports on the effects of studying various civics topics on civic skills. Based on author's Ph.D. Dissertation, "Civic Skills and Civic Education: An Empirical Assessment," University of Maryland, School of Public Policy, 2005.
- ≡ **Participation in Sports and Civic Engagement:** Explores the effect that sports participation can have on the civic engagement of young people. The research finds that young people who are involved in sports report higher levels of voting, volunteering and engagement in their community than those who do not participate. Based mainly on data collected in the National Civic Engagement Survey (Spring 2002).
- ≡ **College Attendance and Civic Engagement:** Examines the link between college experience and civic engagement, including breakdowns by gender. Based mainly on data collected in the National Civic Engagement Survey (Spring 2002).

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

*The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Datasets.*

### CIRCLE CONVENES LEADING RESEARCHERS TO DISCUSS THE CIVIC MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

On December 1st and 2nd, 2005, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the American Political Science Association's Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement, and CIRCLE convened 22 distinguished scholars in Palo Alto, CA, to discuss the civic mission of higher education. Participants (representing the disciplines of psychology, political science, philosophy, education, sociology, and economics) discussed the historical role that higher education has played in developing citizens as well as some major research findings on the topic. The meeting resulted in a detailed agenda for future research.

The complete findings from the meeting are contained in a new report entitled "Higher Education: Civic Mission, Civic Effects" which can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

#### CONSENSUS ON CIVIC MISSION

Participants agreed that colleges and universities have a civic mission. After considering the historical role that colleges and universities have played in developing citizens, the attendees came to consensus that the civic mission of these institutions includes being good institutional citizens that serve their communities in multiple ways: providing forums for free democratic dialogue; conducting research on democracy, civil society, and civic development; and educating their own students to be effective and responsible citizens. The meeting focused on this last role, civic education.

#### THE CIVIC EFFECTS OF COLLEGE ATTENDANCE

The researchers spent much of the day discussing what is known about the effects of college attendance on civic engagement. Current research shows strong correlations between years spent in school and participation in politics and civil society. However, these correlations do not by themselves prove that colleges and universities enhance students' civic skills, knowledge, and commitments and make them more likely to participate. There are several other plausible explanations, including the following:

- (1) Adolescents who are already disposed to civic and political participation are more likely than disengaged students to

complete higher levels of education.

- (2) Compared to citizens with less education, those who are educationally more successful have more social status and resources, which lead to more engagement.
- (3) Colleges bring relatively engaged young people together so that they learn civic skills and disposition from one another.

The available data make it difficult to test these hypotheses with great precision. However, there is evidence that colleges can at least reinforce the civic characteristics that their incoming students bring with them, thereby adding value.

#### CONVERGENT EVIDENCE ON PEDAGOGY

Attendees also discussed the effects of different pedagogies. In general, they agreed that learning and development require encounters with challenging ideas and people. Moreover, learning happens when students are actively engaged in a supportive environment. Education requires real-world activities and social interaction as well as discipline-based instruction. Learning occurs in many venues and from many sources.

These general principles are consistent with studies and longitudinal data that find lasting positive effects from service learning, student government, religious participation, groups that explore diversity, and other experiential civic learning. Prompting students to reflect on their experience appears to be an important component.

The Carnegie Foundation's Political Engagement Project is examining courses and programs that use various forms of experiential civic education at the college level, including service-learning, internships, semesters in Washington DC, visiting speakers, simulations, collaborative social research projects, and living/learning communities. The preliminary findings, based on pre- and post-interviews and surveys, show positive results from the 21 programs studied, with a particularly strong positive influence on students who enter the programs with a low level of political interest.

#### CIVIC DEVELOPMENT AS A PUBLIC AND PRIVATE GOOD

The dilemma of civic development as a public and private good,

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which colleges face when implementing civic education initiatives, surfaced frequently during the conference. Participants agreed that civic identities, skills, dispositions, and knowledge are public goods because they strengthen a democratic society and promote social justice. However, if individual colleges and universities provide civic education as a public good, they may not be able to attract students who seek the individual human capital needed to compete in a global economy. The same problem of incentives applies for faculty. Many professors acknowledge that their institutions have a mission to develop good citizens, but they do not want to accept that responsibility themselves.

The report finds, "Since civic learning has public benefits and may compete with other, more private goods, it is crucial to address the institutional structures and incentives that either promote or discourage civic education at the college level. These structures may include procedures for tenure and promotion; systems for accrediting, evaluating, and rating institutions; and, the availability of funding for particular kinds of teaching and research."

## TWO MODELS OF CIVIC DEVELOPMENT

Participants also discussed the role of motivation in civic education. It is common in the literature on civic development to assume that students can be motivated, given incentives, or compelled to conduct service. In short, changing the values or priorities of youth affects their participation. An alternative model, advanced in the work of James Youniss and colleagues, received some support at the conference. In this model, motivation comes after membership and participation, not before. Most young people will participate if they have opportunities. In the course of participation, they incur obligations, obtain fulfillment, and develop relationships that affect their identities. They become more likely to participate in the future.

## AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The meeting concluded with the development of a research agenda to enhance civic education at the college level. Peter Levine, one of the conference organizers, notes, "While there is convergent evidence about the principles of effective civic education at the classroom or program level, much needs to be learned about the broader topic of college students' civic development."

The following priorities for future research were identified during the conference. Participants believe that researchers should strive to:

### 1. *Change and enlarge the measures used in research*

- Focus on relevant characteristics of institutions: not just size, type, mission (for which data are easily available), but also campus culture, institutional leadership, and the array of civic opportunities provided across each campus and community.
- Broaden existing measures of civic engagement (without dropping older measures that are useful for measuring trends).

### 2. *Disaggregate factors that are sometimes conflated*

- Disaggregate research on institutions of higher education by looking at different types of institution and multiple venues within colleges and universities.
- Disaggregate outcomes by level of analysis (individual, organization, university-wide culture, surrounding community, and other external venues).
- Disaggregate data by gender, race and ethnicity, immigrant status, family socio-economic status, ideology, religion, and region.
- Disaggregate "civic engagement" by form (e.g., service, voting, protest), by political versus non-political purpose, by location and venue, by formal or informal organization, by level or intensity of participation, and by motivation.

### 3. *Strengthen research methods*

- Employ comparative, experimental, and longitudinal methods. (Longitudinal studies are especially important in this field, because of concern about the lasting effects of youth experiences.)
- Conduct large comparative studies on multiple campuses.
- Look not only for direct effects from programs and policies but also for indirect effects.

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## YOUTH POLITICAL WEBSITES COME OF AGE IN 2004

CAMPAIGN WEBSITES MAKE MODEST IMPROVEMENTS IN REACHING OUT TO YOUNG VOTERS

Increasingly, people are turning to the internet for quick and accurate information about politics and political campaigns. This is especially true for young people. Estimates suggest that in 2004, almost a third of 18-29-year-olds were getting most of their information on campaigns from the internet (Pew Research Center, 2004).<sup>1</sup>

A new CIRCLE Working Paper (#42) by Lance Bennett and Michael Xenos explores the extent to which the internet can create opportunities to engage young people into the political process. The authors examined 2004 election campaign sites (for candidates for the House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and Governor) and youth civic engagement sites of organizations such as Rock the Vote and New Voters Project to determine how these sites appeal to young people on various issues. Additionally, they compared the changes in these Web sites between 2002 and 2004.

*According to Dr. Bennett, "We believe that the period between 2002 and 2004 was one in which the youth engagement Web sphere 'came of age.'"*

The research suggests that young voters who went online in 2004 found more political information and resources than in 2002. According to Dr. Bennett, "We believe that the period between 2002 and 2004 was one in which the youth engagement Web sphere 'came of age.'" While youth political sites improved in size, function and content, campaign Web sites made smaller but promising efforts to reach out to young voters.

### 2004 WITNESSES GROWTH IN YOUTH POLITICAL WEB SITES

The study focuses on two areas, termed "Web Spheres." The first, the "Electoral Web Sphere," is "comprised of campaign Web sites produced by candidates." The second, the "Youth Engagement Web Sphere," is "comprised of non-campaign political engagement and voting sites explicitly targeted at younger age groups."

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center (2004). "Young People More Engaged, More Uncertain, Debates More Important to Young Voters." Released September 30, 2004. [www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_2004\\_Campaign.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_2004_Campaign.pdf)

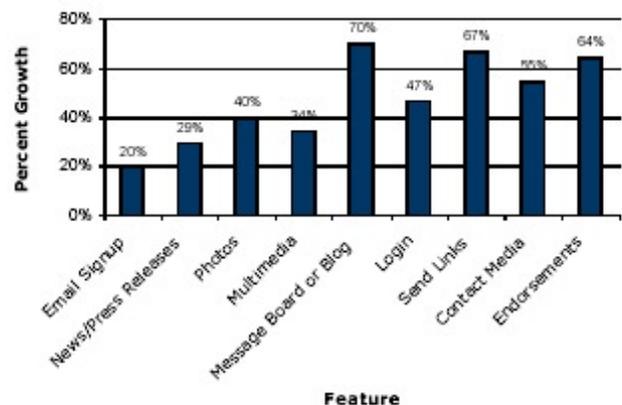
Several methods were used to gather data: the authors catalogued the political context and features of each Web site, used data compiled by Webarchvisit.org, and used iCrawler to gather data on network properties.

According to the study, three major trends stood out when comparing the 2002 and 2004 youth Web sites. First, the sheer number of youth political Web sites identified increased from 22 to 35 between 2002 and 2004. Second, the amount of political information and the sophistication of site features increased. For example, there was a 70 percent growth in the number of sites that contained message boards or blogs. Finally, more youth sites were linked to each other, thus increasing the network of youth engagement sites and the information these sites provide. Dr. Bennett notes, "Youth political Web sites revealed a much more densely networked environment than we found in our prior investigations."

In addition to the three major trends, Bennett and Xenos find that youth political Web sites included improvements such as:

- greater information about the current elections;
- greater information about voter registration;
- greater information about offline political events and opportunities for political participation; and

**Graph 1: Growth in Features on Youth Political Web sites: 2002-2004**



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- more email alerts about new site content and news/press release pages.

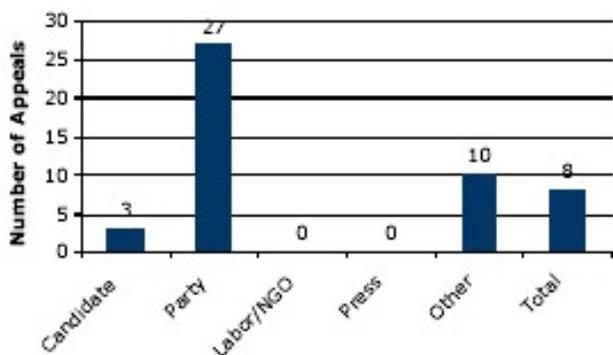
## ELECTORAL WEBSITES MAKE SMALL BUT PROMISING CHANGES

While the Web sites of the two major presidential candidates made a substantial effort to reach out to young voters, the researchers found that candidates for lesser offices as well as sites produced by political and media groups made very few changes to increase their youth audience. Overall, only eight percent of these sites featured some type of appeal to young voters.

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One group of Web sites, political party sites, however, did make substantial efforts to court young voters. Bennett notes, "Political party Web sites did feature youth-targeted content at a non-trivial rate of 27 percent, suggesting that mainstream political actors

**Graph 2: Youth Appeals on Sites in the Electoral Web Sphere, 2004.**



**Graph 2 Source:** Foot, K. A., S. M. Schneider, M. Dougherty (2005). "Web practices of political actors in the 2004 U.S. congressional election Web sphere". *International Communication Association*, New York. May 28.

may be making greater efforts to communicate with young people through the Web."

## BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING YOUTH IN POLITICS THROUGH ONLINE COMMUNICATION

Bennett and Xenos offer two suggestions for drawing more young people into the political process via the Web. First, one relatively easy change that youth-oriented sites could make is to increase the number and prominence of organizational links they provide. The authors maintain that the current Youth Engagement Web Sphere can continue to draw more young voters if more youth-oriented sites provide hyperlinks.

Second, the authors recommend that more interactive features be added to Web sites. They showcase [www.indyvoter.org](http://www.indyvoter.org) as a prime example of a site that successfully used innovative features to draw young people into the political process. According to the authors, "The indyvoter site used features similar to those found on more popular dating and social networking Web sites to help connect younger citizens with those sharing common interests and preferences. The indyvoter site featured a system through which 'joining' the Web site and obtaining a login also involved creating a user profile, complete with photos and general statements. Users could use the profiles to contact each other to share information and coordinate offline political actions, and were encouraged to create their own personal or collective 'voter guides,' which were then made available to all other members."

The full CIRCLE Working Paper (#42), "Young Voters and the Web of Politics 2004: The Youth Political Web Sphere Comes of Age" can be found at [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working\\_papers.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working_papers.htm) ■

## COUNTING VOLUNTEERS: NEW RESEARCH PROVIDES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEASURING THE VOLUNTEERING RATE

Chris Toppe, a social scientist at The Points of Light Foundation, contends that the current Bureau of Labor Statistic (BLS) survey method—used in the Current Population Survey (CPS)—does not accurately gauge the rate of volunteers. He finds that asking behavioral questions about volunteer activities increases the number of volunteers captured by the CPS.

His CIRCLE Working Paper (#43), entitled “Measuring Volunteering: A Behavioral Approach,” assesses the accuracy of two different sets of survey questions on the subject of volunteering. Taking advantage of the *2005 Survey of Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement* sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service and Independent Sector, Toppe tests a total of six questions on volunteering. Only the first two questions—or first set—are currently used to measure volunteering in the CPS. These questions are perceptual questions designed to measure whether people think they volunteer or not. The last four questions—or second set—is an experimental approach designed to measure the respondents’ actual volunteer behavior. The two sets of questions were asked of the same respondents in the *2005 Survey of Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement*. In the end, Toppe finds that the behavioral questions, or the second set, elicit a higher volunteer response.

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*The research suggests that asking behavioral questions produces a more accurate and higher rate of volunteerism (66% vs. 55%). Moreover, the behavioral questions resulted in a higher estimate of average annual volunteer hours (94 vs. 89).*

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### BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS CAPTURE MORE VOLUNTEER BEHAVIOR

The behavioral questions, which Toppe modeled after the research of Hall (2004) and Rooney et al. (2004), are memory prompts that ask about specific volunteer activities. According to the author, “These two sets of questions were asked of the same respondents in the same survey, using the same data collection organization, the US Bureau of the Census, thus eliminating many of the common sources of measurement error.”

The research suggests that asking behavioral questions produces

a more accurate and higher rate of volunteerism (66% vs. 55%). Moreover, the behavioral questions resulted in a higher estimate of average annual volunteer hours (94 vs. 89). According to Toppe, “There are relatively high percentages of teenagers who answered ‘no’ to both CPS questions yet who answered ‘yes’ to at least one of the behavioral questions. The results show that behavioral questions are more accurate than the perceptual questions in identifying who is and isn’t a volunteer.”

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*Toppe emphasizes that the increased response rate is real. He cites the ability of survey participants to “name the place they volunteered, tell how often they volunteered, and how much time they gave, regardless of which set of questions resulted in them being classified as volunteers.”*

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Toppe emphasizes that the increased response rate is real. He cites the ability of survey participants to “name the place they volunteered, tell how often they volunteered, and how much time they gave, regardless of which set of questions resulted in them being classified as volunteers.” Thus, behavioral questions not only captured a larger set of volunteer activities, but these responses were more reliable.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SURVEYS ON VOLUNTEERING

Toppe concludes, “This study shows that in a side-by-side test, the behavioral questions captured volunteers that were missed by the CPS methodology. This suggests that a move toward the behavioral will do a better job at defining the scope and commitment to volunteering.” In order to better measure the rate of volunteering, Toppe suggests that the behavioral methodology be further validated. Upon completion of the validation, he recommends that researchers collaborate to form a standard set of questions that can be used to measure volunteering.

The complete Working Paper can be found on the CIRCLE Web site at [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working\\_papers.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working_papers.htm). 

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE CIVIC MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In a new CIRCLE Working Paper (#39), William Talcott reviews the literature on the civic mission of higher education. Talcott concentrates on “major research universities, with the rationale that these have had disproportionate cultural and institutional influence over the development of higher education as a whole.”

### UNIVERSITIES SHIFT FOCUS FROM MORAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION TO TECHNICAL SKILL TRAINING

The 19th-century American college was explicitly concerned with moral and civic education. In many institutions, the president, who was often an ordained minister, would teach a mandatory capstone course in which students were exhorted to become civic leaders. That approach gave way to what Talcott calls the “modernist” research university. Modernism, he writes, became the “single most influential model of the university/citizenship relationship in the 20th century.”

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*Modernist universities replaced moral exhortation with science, specialization, and the training of experts and professionals. In 1933, President Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago said that “education for citizenship has no place in the university.”*

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Modernist universities replaced moral exhortation with science, specialization, and the training of experts and professionals. In 1933, President Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago said that “education for citizenship has no place in the university.” Many scholars have argued that the modernist research university lacked “an element of moral-critical engagement.” Instead of teaching values and civic habits, it acted “as an agent for individual success through technical skill training.” The research university became “a highly exclusive realm isolated from public concerns, marginalizing moral and civic inquiry in favor of narrow procedures and professional ends.”

### THE CIVIC MOTIVATION BEHIND MODERNIST REFORMS

Talcott revises this interpretation by finding a civic motivation behind the modernist reforms of higher education. “The modernist model framed good citizenship as a matter of free individuals making rational, informed choices.” Universities aimed to provide impartial scientific knowledge for the benefit of citizens; they

also sought to teach their own students habits of critical thinking. These were civic goals, and they explain why modernist universities promoted curricular choice, scientific rationality, autonomy for research disciplines, and academic freedom. The rise of research universities coincided with the Progressive Movement, which promoted “modernist” citizenship through changes in elections and government. Progressive reformers opposed “the highly partisan, physical and occasionally spectacular form of citizenship characteristic of late 19th century electoral politics.”

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*Talcott summarizes this critical literature and describes it as part of “the recovery of republican political/cultural traditions.” He argues, however, against the assumption that modernist universities have lacked civic purposes. Instead, he recommends that we recognize “the tacit models of political society informing current university structures and practices” so that, “through persistent dialogue,” we can find “ways to build on their achievements.”*

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### LEARNING FROM THE PAST: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

By the 1960s, prominent scholars had begun to criticize the modernist university as a “bureaucratic shell,” an institution primarily devoted to its own reproduction that lacked unifying moral or civic purposes. Talcott summarizes this critical literature and describes it as part of “the recovery of republican political/cultural traditions.” He argues, however, against the assumption that modernist universities have lacked civic purposes. Instead, he recommends that we recognize “the tacit models of political society informing current university structures and practices” so that, “through persistent dialogue,” we can find “ways to build on their achievements.” ■

## RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

*From Research to Practice, a column dedicated to recognizing successful "bridges" between researchers and practitioners, reports on research with practical implications for youth civic engagement. Additionally, it presents concrete examples of how practitioners have applied this research to encourage the participation of young people in civic and political life.*

### YOUTH VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In a recent CIRCLE Working Paper (#40) entitled, "The Changing Lifeworld of Young People: Risk, Resume-Padding and Civic Engagement," Lewis A. Friedland and Shauna Morimoto attempted to "reconstruct the most significant networks and institutions that shaped the lives of young people...[and] to demonstrate in some depth the quality of connection and disconnection of young people to these networks." One of the results of the study is a typology of youth volunteerism, which consists of seven motivations, influenced by race and ethnicity, class position, ideological disposition, and religious involvement (see Around the CIRCLE v.3 i.2 for a summary of this typology).

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*Morimoto is quick to emphasize that although there has been a rise in youth volunteering, there is no evidence on what role resume-padding motivations play in this increase. "We don't want [resume-padding] to come across as the only reason kids [volunteer]...I don't think there are easy answers but it brings up a lot of questions."*

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In addition, Friedland and Morimoto identify and discuss one factor that emerged as a thread, in varying degrees, throughout their discussions with young people in Madison, Wisconsin—that "resume-padding" is an implicit motivation for much of youth volunteerism. Friedland and Morimoto find that "service inflation" has embedded itself into the dialogue of college applicants. Often young people report that they hope volunteer activities will assist in achieving admission.

Morimoto is quick to emphasize that although there has been a rise in youth volunteering, there is no evidence on what role resume-padding motivations play in this increase. "We don't want [resume-padding] to come across as the only reason kids [volunteer]...I don't think there are easy answers but it brings up a lot of questions." As Morimoto suggests, these recent findings raise several questions for those seeking to increase youth volunteering and civic engagement more generally.

The research suggests that understanding youth volunteer motivations, or what motivates a particular young person to volunteer, can have practical implications for the way volunteer programs

are managed. Some organizations have already taken their volunteers' motivations into consideration when designing their programs.

#### HOW DO MOTIVATIONS AFFECT PROGRAM MANAGEMENT?

Friedland and Morimoto's findings suggest that understanding how to recruit young people can be tailored to what the purpose of the program is and the people the program seeks to involve. A knowledge of who you are trying to engage can help to bring in people who will either identify with what you are trying to do and want to be a part of it, or who will recognize that they have something to gain from the experience—not mutually exclusive motivations.

Sarah Seames, Coordinator of Community Service Programs at Bowdoin College, suggests that program organizers consider motivations when connecting students with various volunteer opportunities. "When you're dealing with community partners you need to think about what their needs are and send them volunteers who will fulfill their commitments." At the same time, Seames argues that "the motivation isn't as important as the experience that [students] have with it." Seames' experience suggests that despite the many youth motivations for volunteering, the actual volunteer experience could have a larger impact on young people.

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*Sarah Seames, Coordinator of Community Service Programs at Bowdoin College, suggests that organizers consider motivations when connecting students with various volunteer opportunities.*

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#### HOW MIGHT MOTIVATIONS AFFECT ANTICIPATED YOUTH CIVIC OUTCOMES?

Friedland and Morimoto offer that "service inflation plausibly explains in part, the gap between political and civic activity described in "The Civic and Political Health of the Nation" (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins 2002)...Our findings call into question some of the vibrancy apparent in the high rate of youth volunteerism." Friedland goes on to suggest that their research may suggest a "hollowing out of motivation, not an establishment of motivation" that will be a foundation for volunteering in the future.

## RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

The context in which young people are volunteering can serve to influence motivations. For example, Julie Ayers, Service Learning Specialist at the Maryland State Department of Education, reports that her experience has been “that when students are involved in a really well designed project they get excited when they see that they can make a difference...it changes students’ self-perceptions.” The State of Maryland instituted a state-wide service learning requirement for high school graduation and has developed a series of guidelines to inform local school systems about implementing the requirement, which includes seven best practices. Ayers emphasizes that the quality of the service learning experience affects youth civic development: “it has to be a well-executed project. Students know what’s busy work.”

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Furthermore, Friedland suggests that “there has to be a strong link between the actual interest and motives of young people and the work.” Many academic institutions are beginning to build community service into a range of academic courses as a means of engaging both faculty and students in civic work.

#### HOW MIGHT MOTIVATIONS AFFECT COMMUNITY IMPACT?

Assessing and “mapping” community needs is a popular approach to encouraging youth civic engagement. This may suggest that being deliberate about developing clear objectives for a volunteer project can not only be educational for the youth involved, but can also lead to more genuine and sustainable relationships within communities. Some programs have found that the motivations of their youth volunteers change after their volunteer experience.

The National Honor Society (NHS) has been working on ways to be deliberate about the community impact of their chapters’

volunteer work. The National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) have chapters in over 20,000 schools nationwide. While each chapter is required to organize one service project per year, local chapters decide what this project will be and what additional volunteer activities should be pursued. Decisions vary by school, with one high school in the Midwest requiring that students do 100 hours of volunteering.

“The variety of projects depend on crises that are in the news and local needs that emerge,” says David Cordts, Associate Director of NHS and NJHS. However, at the moment, Cordts says, “We are working on creating a tool for chapters to do a needs assessment of their community and school.” Making community-based outcomes one of the goals of the volunteer activity may have a positive effect on how youth approach their volunteer work and consequently have a positive effect on the community. ■

#### YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: AN INSTITUTIONAL TURN

A new CIRCLE Working Paper edited by Peter Levine and James Youniss collects fourteen short essays by leading scholars in political science, psychology, education, communications, and sociology. According to the introduction: “Research, policy, and practice regarding youth civic engagement should consider not only direct efforts to change young people’s civic skills, knowledge, and behavior (for example, through civic education or voter mobilization), but also reforms of institutions that might make participation more rewarding and welcome. The problem is not always inside young people’s heads; sometimes they are right to avoid participation in the processes and institutions that exist for them. For similar reasons, it is important to study (and perhaps to change) their ordinary, daily experiences, assumptions, and expectations.” Each of the fourteen short essays suggests ways to expand the study of youth civic engagement to include institutions and cultural contexts as well as the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of individual youth. The collection, entitled “Youth Civic Engagement: An Institutional Turn,” can be found here: [www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working\\_papers.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/working_papers.htm)

The conference that generated these papers was funded by a separate grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York to the Life-Cycle Institute of Catholic University of America; CIRCLE collaborated with the Life-Cycle Institute.

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#### 4. Focus on institutions and communities

- Develop evidence about the impact of institutional leadership (which includes both the effects of individual leaders and the institutionalization of their vision).
- Examine institutional culture as both a dependent and an independent variable: what effects do different campus cultures have, and how can positive cultures be built?
- Investigate interactions between communities and institutions of higher education in shaping student outcomes.
- Study higher education as a venue for free public debate: to what extent does a college or university that promotes debate affect political discourse outside?
- Investigate the integration of a broad range of co-curricular opportunities.

#### 5. Address issues raised by the current literature

- Weigh competing explanations of the macro trends in civic engagement: do they result from political, demographic, or economic changes? What is the impact of changes in social and economic context (e.g., the lengthening transition to adulthood, the changing content of “occupational” skills)?
- Address self-selection problems to disentangle effects of colleges from maturation effects and broader changes in society.
- Investigate the effects of civic pedagogies on students’ academic learning (defined in traditional ways). 

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## CIRCLE

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