

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK: CIRCLE IS MOVING TO TUFTS UNIVERSITY

**C**IRCLE is moving to Tufts! During the summer of 2008, CIRCLE will become part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. An ideal home for our organization, Tisch College is committed to active citizenship at Tufts, in the surrounding communities, and in the nation and the world. Working with colleagues at Tufts and partners at other institutions, we will help to build an innovative, ambitious, and rigorous research program that will influence scholarship and practice and thereby help to renew democracy.

We are deeply grateful to the University of Maryland, which has been our home since we were founded in 2001. A great land-grant state university, Maryland recognizes its civic mission and has built important programs and initiatives to educate its own students in active citizenship, to engage with its surrounding communities, and to study and support civic engagement. In fact, CIRCLE is the lineal descendant of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, housed at the University of Maryland in the late 1990s. CIRCLE's other closest associations have been with Maryland School of Public Policy and the Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy, highly



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## "MILLENNIALS TALK POLITICS: A STUDY OF COLLEGE STUDENT POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT"

College students in the United States are hungry for political conversation that is authentic, involves diverse views and is free of manipulation and "spin," according to a report released in November by CIRCLE and the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. The report follows up on a 1993 study conducted by the Harwood Group for the Kettering Foundation that found students considered politics "irrelevant" to their lives and they saw little purpose in actively participating in politics. Current students do not share those views—they are eager to go into their communities and put their education to work.

The report reveals major changes in today's college students' behaviors and attitudes as compared to Generation X. Millennial college students are more engaged in their communities and think the political system could be a vehicle for change, but they are turned off by intensely combative political debate and "spin."

"Millennials Talk Politics" was released on November 7th at The University of California's Washington Center in Washington, DC. The event included a series of panel discussions with top political, academic, and civic engagement experts and students.



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**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

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The top findings include:

### #1 MILLENNIALS DISLIKE SPIN AND POLARIZED DEBATE: THEY SEEK AUTHENTIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCUSSING PUBLIC ISSUES

Today's students—part of the Millennial Generation born between 1985 and 2004— are more engaged in their communities and feel responsible to become civically involved. They recognize the importance of being educated and involved citizens, but discard much of the information available to them because of its polarizing and partisan nature. They are turned off by intensely combative political debate.

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*"We know students want information—but from sources they trust," said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine. "We also know the generation of emerging adults is more engaged than Generation X and more likely to appreciate an authentic opportunity for reasonable discourse. Our research shows there are opportunities for candidates to connect with and motivate them to vote."*

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### #2 TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE MORE ENGAGED THAN GENERATION X WAS

The 1993 Kettering Foundation study found Generation X students to be individualistic and alienated; they strongly identified with self and found little use for political involvement. Students in the "Millennials Talk Politics" focus groups were different. According to the report's lead author, Abby Kiesa, "Our focus groups revealed a generation of college students who have a great deal of experience with volunteering and who believe in their obligation to work together with others on social issues. They are neither cynical nor highly individualistic."

### #3 MILLENNIALS ARE INVOLVED LOCALLY WITH OTHERS BUT ARE AMBIVALENT ABOUT FORMAL POLITICS

Today's students are proud of their civic activism. However, the confrontational arena that currently defines American politics is distasteful to the majority of those surveyed, with few willing to embrace a party label. Still, they are not tuning out politics altogether.

More college students are voting today as voter turnout rose substantially in 2004 and again in 2006, but most students in the study view voting more as a necessary "symbolic gesture" than as a means for creating change. A University of California Berkeley student said, "I think voting is the least you can do in terms of showing that you're political."

The report suggests that it is not a lack of information, but an overload of news and opinion students find untrustworthy because of "spin" and partisan bent. A Princeton student summarized college students' general frustrations: "Politics to me...does not have an idealistic connotation, whereas rallying and activism and going for a cause has more of that idealistic undertone, while politics is marred by bad deals."

### #4 DIFFERENCES AMONG THE MILLENNIALS: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE PROVIDING VERY UNEQUAL LEVELS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING

The study found that colleges and universities are providing very unequal levels of opportunity for learning and participation. Students at some institutions complained that it was difficult to cross their campuses without being recruited for a political cause, and there were many other opportunities to participate, discuss, and learn about issues. On other campuses, few students reported they had opportunities for political engagement.

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The report's chief recommendation is that the problems of information overload, confusion about formal politics and uncertainty over ways to achieve social change could be mitigated if students had more opportunities to discuss current issues. It also suggests providing more experiences to stimulate meaningful discussions in various "open" and "authentic" settings—venues not dominated by groups that have political agendas.

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The research is based on 47 focus groups with a total of 386 student participants, conducted by CIRCLE on 12 four-year college and university campuses. These two-hour focus groups were conducted on campuses between October 2006 and July 2007 (pilot focus groups were conducted at the University of Maryland in June 2006). Students also completed a brief survey and received compensation for participation.

Students participating in the survey attended the following campuses: Bowdoin College; Kansas State University; Princeton University; Providence College; Tougaloo College in Jackson, Miss.; University of California, Berkeley; University of Dayton; University of Maryland; University of Massachusetts, Boston; University of Minnesota-Twin Cities; University of New Mexico and Wake Forest University. 

## CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

### SOME RECENT NEWS ARTICLES CITING CIRCLE RESEARCH...

- ≡ "Barack Obama, Mike Huckabee's Iowa Caucus Wins Are Largely Thanks To Young Voters" by James Montgomery  
**MTV.com**, 1/4/2008
- ≡ "Appetite for Change Finally Draws Young Voters to the Polls" by Joe Garofoli  
**The San Francisco Chronicle**, 1/6/2008
- ≡ "For Young Voters In a Media Jungle, A Study Guide" by Jose Antonio Vargas  
**The Washington Post**, 1/11/2008
- ≡ "Technology Plays Key Role in Drawing Young Voters to Presidential Race" by Karen Brooks  
**The Dallas Morning News**, 1/12/2008
- ≡ "GOP Candidates Should Court Young Voters" by Karin Agness  
**Townhall.com**, 1/18/2008
- ≡ "Millennials, Unspun" by Andy Guess  
**Inside Higher Ed**, 11/8/2007
- ≡ "Web Tool of Choice for New Generation" by Leah Rupp  
**Jackson Clarion-Ledger**, 11/5/2007
- ≡ "A Snapshot of Today's Young Voter" by Karin Fischer  
**The Chronicle of Higher Education**, 11/7/2007
- ≡ "Service Trumps Politics for Young" by Rebecca Putterman  
**The Daily Tar Heel**, 11/12/2007