

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

turn encourage candidates to focus on policy issues that are of greater importance to young people.

However, the real potential of the alternative methods may not be truly realized unless more young people register to vote. The U.S. Census estimates that between one third to one half of the youth population is not registered to vote, resulting in large numbers of young people who cannot take advantage of these new, more convenient voting reforms. A copy of the report can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site (www.civicyouth.org). 

If you are interested in learning more about the findings from this report, Dr. Fitzgerald will be a participant in the "Institutional Change and Civic Engagement in the U.S.: Diagnoses and Prescriptions" roundtable at the April 2003 61st Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP

Each year, many American adolescents participate in extracurricular activities such as student government, sports teams, school newspapers, hobby clubs, vocational clubs, or debate teams. In February of 2003, CIRCLE released a literature review conducted by Mary Kirlin addressing the relationship between adolescent participation in these extracurricular activities and adult political engagement.

Dr. Kirlin, of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, searched thirty years worth of relevant research in political science, psychology, education and sociology and determined that the volume of directly relevant research was fairly underdeveloped. The review contains approximately thirty studies considered potentially relevant to the question.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The literature Dr. Kirlin identified concludes that there is a relationship between adolescent extracurricular activities and adult political and civic activities such as voting and volunteering. In fact, two studies suggest causation attributing between 17 and 19 percent of the direct effect of adult political participation to adolescent extracurricular activity.

Another consistent finding is that different types of organizations generate different behavioral impacts. Research has found that adults who were involved in instrumental organizations (those with a collective goal beyond individual participation such as student government, school newspapers, and debate teams) were more involved in political activities as adults than those involved in expressive activities (such as athletics, band and orchestra, and hobby clubs).

A further important finding is that adolescents from both high and low socio-economic status (SES) families who take part in extracurricular activities participate in adult civic and political life at similar rates. Finally, studies utilizing a developmental approach to political socialization are providing the richest insight into the relationship between adolescent extracurricular participation and adult political engagement.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the consistent and positive findings that have emerged over the past thirty years, there are still many questions about the role of adolescent extracurricular activities in adult political engagement. For example, why does the relationship between adolescent and adult activities exist? Is there direct causation or is there another casual factor that has yet to be considered? Why do adolescents join organizations in the first place? Additional longitudinal research in this area, especially by inter-disciplinary teams, has the potential to help practitioners better prepare the next generation of citizens for civic and political life. A free copy of the literature review can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site (www.civicyouth.org). 

NEW STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Researchers from Child Trends and the University of Michigan led by Jonathan Zaff recently investigated strategies for creating programs and policies to promote positive citizenship. This research challenges the traditional theoretical model that programs designed to encourage civic engagement should focus solely on opportunities to participate in civic behaviors, such as volunteering. Dr. Zaff et al. argue that social and cultural interactions in youths' lives and the development of civic values are also important factors that should