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## Tufts University's Center on Youth Political Engagement Releases Report on Impact of AmeriCorps on Voting

Study Finds No Evidence that AmeriCorps Mobilizes Young People Politically; Non-voters More Likely to Enroll in Program

**Medford, MA** – A new study from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (<u>CIRCLE</u>), the preeminent youth research organization based at Tufts University, finds no evidence that the federally funded service program AmeriCorps mobilizes people politically.

According to the new study, young adults tend to become more civically engaged during their twenties, regardless of whether or not they served in AmeriCorps. The report shows that AmeriCorps has no independent effect on the chances that disengaged youth will start voting, but it substantially broadens the civic engagement of those who do vote. They also become involved in their communities in non-political ways.

The study was conducted by Andrea K. Finlay, Human Development and Family Studies, The Pennsylvania State University; Constance Flanagan, Dept. of Interdisciplinary Studies, School of Human Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Laura Wray-Lake, School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences, Claremont Graduate University. They used data from a nationally representative, eight-year longitudinal study of more than 3,000 people, comparing those who enrolled in AmeriCorps with those who indicated interest in the program but did not enroll.

Additional data is available in the "Impact of AmeriCorps on Voting" fact sheet on the CIRCLE website, http://www.civicyouth.org/?=3853.

Peter Levine, Director of CIRCLE, noted that the relationship between federal service programs and political engagement has been controversial in recent years.

"Some conservative critics have argued that programs like AmeriCorps could encourage young people to take political action in favor of liberal causes or Democratic candidates," Levine said. "Other critics have worried that the program, which promotes volunteering and has strict rules against political activity, may divert young people toward uncontroversial service and away from electoral politics."

Levine continued, "In fact, non-voters are substantially more likely to enroll in AmeriCorps, and there is equally little evidence that the program channels engagement away from politics. Specifically, the report shows that active voters who enroll in AmeriCorps will become more broadly active in community affairs eight years later."

The <u>Huffington Post reported on Wednesday</u> on the lack of federal funding for AmeriCorps positions, despite President Obama's 2008 campaign pledge to grow the program. According to

the article, the 2009 signing of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act intended to grow the number of AmeriCorps members to 170,000 by 2013, while the government currently provides funding to support only 82,500 members. AmeriCorps has turned away approximately 1 million applicants in the past two years.

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CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous gift from the Pew Charitable Trusts and is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. CIRCLE's reputation for reliable, independent, timely research has been hailed by experts in the field of civic partnership, such as Harvard University professor Robert Putnam who said CIRCLE had brought "the best and most serious research to one place."

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (<a href="http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/">http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/</a>) is a national leader whose model and research are setting the standard for higher education's role in civic engagement education. Serving every school of Tufts University, Tisch College creates an enduring culture that prepares students to be lifelong active citizens.

Tufts University (www.tufts.edu), located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the university's schools is widely encouraged.