

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.

MILLENNIALS TALK POLITICS: CLUES FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

In November 2007, CIRCLE released a major new report on college students' political engagement entitled *Millennials Talk Politics* (MTP), based on 47 focus groups on 12 four-year campuses across the country. This 'Research to Practice' article provides concrete examples of how MTP has been used by students, college professors, and college administrators to encourage further student engagement.

MTP: Main Findings and Recommendations

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Today's College Students are More Engaged than Generation X Was
2. Millennials are Involved Locally with Others but are Ambivalent about Formal Politics
3. Millennials Dislike Spin and Polarized Debates and Seek Authentic Opportunities for Discussing Public Issues
4. Differences Among the Millennials: Colleges and Universities are Providing Very Unequal Levels of Opportunity for Civic Participation and Learning

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All Students Need to have Opportunities for Civic and Political Participation, and
2. Students Need Opportunities and Space for Deliberation on Public Issues

THE REPORT IN USE

IN THE CLASSROOM

First-year students who enrolled in the class entitled *Civic Participation and Community Leadership* at Duke University were required to read *Millennials Talk Politics*. According to the class

professor, Dr. Alma Blount, the report provided students with an excellent opportunity to think about "participation and their generation." Furthermore, it gave them the opportunity "to think a little bit more clearly about their role [within the political system]." According Dr. Blount, using *Millennials Talk Politics* as a required reading provided students with a unique opportunity to learn "the art of having great political conversations" and a chance to "develop an understanding of a deeper context."

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OPPORTUNITY FOR REFLECTION

National Student Partnerships (NSP - www.nspnet.org), a student-led volunteer service organization, used the MTP report in a reflection exercise at their 2008 national conference. Every year their conference seeks to provide the opportunity for students to "share insights, challenges, and best practices as they pursue NSP's mission."

The 2008 NSP conference challenged students to think about "student motivations for service and methods for engaging in social change." A closing panel was organized around the MTP report. After reading the report, each participant was given the opportunity to reflect on his or her own work with NSP, think about how political engagement plays a role in this work, and consider how working within the political system could help them to better achieve their goals.

THINKING STRATEGICALLY

One of the main findings from the MTP report is that students feel there are few opportunities on their campus for political engagement. With this finding in mind, CIRCLE staff worked with students and staff from the CalCorps



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Public Service Center at UC-Berkeley to facilitate a workshop at the Western Regional Campus Compact Conference for campus administrators. The goal of the workshop was to help administrators reflect on the types of engagement opportunities they offer to their students and devise a “wish list” of the types of student engagement opportunities they want to support. The majority of participants said that their program or office does not provide all of the types of opportunities that they think it should. Not surprisingly, most of the missing opportunities were policy/politically-related.

PROMOTING DISCUSSION

Millennials Talk Politics will be a big part of the conversation this Fall at Wake Forest University, one of the twelve universities where CIRCLE held focus groups as a part of the study. Each year, incoming freshmen at the school are assigned a reading around a current issue, and during orientation they are required to attend a lecture by a nationally recognized expert on the topic. This year's required reading is *Millennials Talk Politics*. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a nationally known scholar and commentator on politics and the media, will speak to students on August 22nd, on trends in the 2008 election cycle and why they matter.

The text box to the right provides more examples of how the report can be used to facilitate political discussions on college campuses. Copies of Millennials Talk Politics report can be downloaded from www.civicyouth.org.

CIRCLE staff are also available to help you plan a reflection activity using the report. Please contact Abby Kiesa, CIRCLE Outreach Coordinator and Researcher, at Abby.Kiesa@Tufts.edu if you are interested in learning more about the MTP report. ■

Using MTP to Engage Students

- ✓ Send a hard copy of the report to administrators and faculty on campus to start/continue conversations about civic and political engagement
- ✓ Distribute copies of the report to student service leaders and discuss the ways to connect policy and the political system to their program reflection/discussions
- ✓ Integrate the findings of the report into a leadership program to discuss civic and political leadership
- ✓ Host a discussion for members of campus about the 2008 election using findings from *Millennials Talk Politics* as a discussion prompt
- ✓ Work with a service-learning class to conduct similar focus groups on your campus using the questions at the end of *Millennials Talk Politics* to learn more about what students on your campus think
- ✓ Organize a panel discussion about how young people can play important roles in addressing public issues and invite high school students, local elected officials and community leaders
- ✓ Host a day-long forum on the state of engagement on your campus, what more can be done, and what can be done to strengthen existing efforts
- ✓ Send out a proposal to faculty for developing a course on youth and the political system and give out a course development grant to the best proposal