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# Civic Engagement Assessment: Linking Activities to Attitudes

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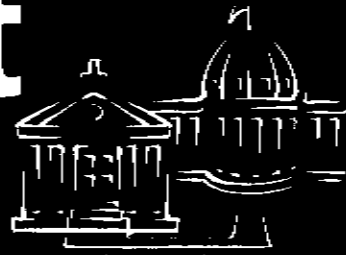
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May–June 2007  
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Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

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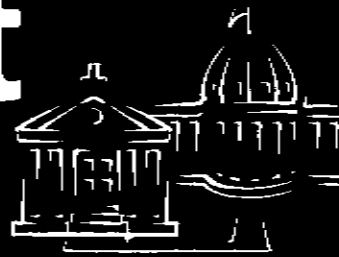
**I**N THE MARCH–APRIL 2005 ISSUE OF *ASSESSMENT UPDATE*, TRUDY BANTA ISSUED a call to readers to provide information on individual campuses' efforts to assess civic engagement. This call has prompted us to share the multifaceted approach that Tufts University has taken to describe and assess this area of student endeavor. Specifically, we will describe an in-depth study designed to investigate undergraduates' participation in and attitudes toward civic engagement.

Recently, higher education has witnessed a renewed commitment to the mission of preparing students for lives of active citizenship (Boyer, 1996; Checkoway, 2001; Harkavy, 2006). Under the leadership of President Lawrence S. Bacow, Tufts University has articulated an institutional mission that embraces three areas of focus: active citizenship, internationalism, and life sciences and the environment. The Tufts vision statement supports these initiatives, declaring, "As an institution, we are committed to improving the human condition through education and discovery. Beyond this commitment, we will strive to be a model for society at large. We want to foster an attitude of 'giving back,' an understanding that active citizen participation is essential to freedom and democracy, and a desire to make the world a better place."

Institutional statements such as this vision statement provide evidence that effective student civic engagement is important and receiving recognition. To these ends, Tufts is also working to infuse active citizenship throughout the university, from first-year orientation to alumni relations, for students, faculty, and staff in the undergraduate colleges and in the graduate and professional schools. The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (Tisch College) was established in 2000 to facilitate and support a wide range of programs that build faculty and student knowledge, skills, and values in civic engagement. To evaluate these efforts, the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation conducts annual surveys that, among other things, assess student, faculty, and alumni participation in civic engagement. Questions on students' involvement in civic engagement activities and their attitudes toward such activities have been

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incorporated into standard outcomes assessment instruments, including the New Student Survey, the Sophomore Experience and First Year Engineering Advising Surveys, and the Tufts Senior Survey. In addition, items designed to capture the number of hours and in what ways alumni are contributing to their community have been added to the graduate and professional schools' alumni surveys.

To what extent does participation in specific activities affect students' attitudes toward civic engagement, both during the undergraduate years and after graduation?



To understand whether and how Tufts is preparing its undergraduate students to be engaged public citizens and leaders, administrators from Tisch College, in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation, are conducting a longitudinal study of civic engagement that examines the linkages between students' experiences and their civic and political actions and attitudes. The study addresses two primary research questions: (1) To what extent does participation in specific activities affect students' attitudes toward civic engagement, both during the undergraduate years and after graduation? (2) How do students' civic and political attitudes, knowledge, and skills develop and change during the undergraduate years?

Of particular interest is assessing the impact of Tisch College's Citizenship and Public Service (CPS) Scholars Program on cultivating civic competence, as well as identify-

*(continued on page 14)*

## Civic Engagement Assessment

(continued from page 2)

ing other activities that influence students' development in this area. The CPS Scholars Program works with sophomores, juniors, and seniors to develop leadership skills and to play a significant role in elevating active citizenship. CPS scholars act as catalysts in the general student population, engaging peers and faculty in the values and activities of active citizenship. In collaboration with local organizations, CPS scholars work on projects to create positive change and build capacity in Tufts's partner communities and throughout the world.

In 2003, a multiyear time-series study was launched to assess the university's success in reaching its goal of instilling civic knowledge, skills, and values in all of its undergraduates. The principal data collection instrument is an annual Web-based survey administered to participants during their four years at Tufts and two years after graduation. A subset of students participates in follow-up interviews as sophomores and as seniors. These baseline data are triangulated with students' responses from other outcomes assessment instruments, student transcripts, and demographic data to ascertain how varying participation levels affect participants' attitudes toward civic engagement.

To date, qualitative and quantitative data on students' activities and attitudes have been collected for four successive academic cohorts, those graduating in the years 2007 to 2010. Study recruitment has occurred each fall (2003 through 2006) by inviting all first-year students to take the Tisch College Participant Survey. This survey instrument, designed as a screening tool for selecting study participants, captures students' levels of participation in community service during high school as well as basic demographic data.

Tisch College Participant Survey respondents became the population from which the sample for each cohort was drawn. To facilitate later comparative

analysis, respondents were divided into three distinct groups based on their involvement in civic engagement activities in high school: CPS Scholars, High School – High Participants (HS Highs), and High School – Low Participants (HS Lows). For the 2007 through 2009 cohorts, the students' participation in community service in high school was as follows:

- CPS Scholars averaged 16.8 hours of community service per month in high school.
- HS Highs averaged 19.3 hours of community service per month in high school.
- HS Lows averaged 2.7 hours of community service per month in high school.

A stratified, representative sample (in terms of gender, racial background, and school affiliation) of students from each cohort was selected to participate in the study. The sample for each cohort consists of 60–80 undergraduates, for a total of 196 participants to date. The study has numerous protocols to preserve participant confidentiality and has been approved by Tufts's Institutional Review Board for research on human subjects.

Each spring, all participants complete the annual Civic and Political Activities and Attitudes Survey (CPAAS). The survey was constructed by compiling ques-

Andrew Furco, and Dwight Giles each reviewed and provided input on the survey instrument.) The items were integrated or adapted from the following eight validated instruments: the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement's (CIRCLE's) Young Citizens Survey; Pew's Civic and Political Health of a Nation (developed by CIRCLE; see <<http://www.civicyouth.org/>>); the Americorps Baseline Survey (developed by the Corporation for National Service; see <<http://www.national-service.org>>); two subscales of the Civic Attitude and Skills Questionnaire (Social Justice attitudes and Diversity attitudes); the Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale; the Public Service Motivation Scale; and the Social Responsibility Inventory. These instruments are reviewed in *The Measure of Service Learning* (Bringle, Phillips, and Hudson, 2004).

The CPAAS aims to examine the extent to which the Tufts experience influences students' civic knowledge, skills, and values. The CPAAS contains questions that focus on students' undergraduate activities; it also includes a civic engagement scale that assesses students' attitudes toward the importance of and belief in the values of civic engagement. These activity and attitudinal questions are designed to enable a comparative analysis that highlights how participation in the CPS Scholars Program and levels of community service in high school affect students' choices of activities and

Preliminary findings suggest that students' civic attitudes and participation in civically based activities vary significantly according to their levels of involvement in community service in high school and involvement in the CPS Scholars program while at Tufts.



tions from existing instruments designed to gather information on college students' civic and political engagement, as well as creating additional items specific to the research questions. (Robert Bringle,

their attitudes about civic and political action during the undergraduate years.

Students' attitudes toward the importance of civic engagement are measured on five factors: value and commitment to

the public good, personal efficacy through community service, personal efficacy through politics, appreciation of dynamics of diversity, and awareness of and interest in community and national issues. Students' behaviors that exhibit their dedication to civic engagement are scaled according to the number of hours they spend participating in community service activities, civic actions, and political actions.

Preliminary findings suggest that students' civic attitudes and participation in civically based activities vary significantly according to their levels of involvement in community service in high school and involvement in the CPS Scholars program while at Tufts. CPS Scholars' involvement during college has differed from that of HS Highs or HS Lows; CPS Scholars indicate more involvement in civic and political activities than HS Highs or HS Lows. While participation levels of all three research groups in community service activities differ significantly from one another, all students' participation in civic

among HS Highs or HS Lows. In contrast, students' attitudes toward dynamics of diversity do not differ significantly. Specifically, students' views (regardless of research group) are similar with regard to the positive and negative dynamics of interacting with individuals of diverse economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds.

Results of the interviews with sophomores have further illuminated the differences in students' opinions about an individual's ability to influence a community through civic efforts. CPS Scholars and HS Highs frequently indicated that they believed individuals can evoke change in a community through community service. Interviewees cited the reactions and "feedback" of "the people that you interact with [through community service]" as evidence of the powerful effect of their efforts in the community. In particular, one interviewee noted, "Just seeing how you can make a difference, one person, person to person, that definitely has made me feel that individuals can impact a community."

Students' level of involvement in community service activities  
is the most influential factor in determining the level of their belief in  
their ability to evoke positive developments in a community  
through community service.



activities increased significantly during their first two years at Tufts.

In addition, initial results indicate that CPS Scholars' views of the importance of four of the five factor categories of civic learning outcomes differed significantly from those of the other two research groups. CPS Scholars' attitudes toward the implied civic responsibility as citizens to perform public service, their power to evoke change through community service, the potential impact of their own political service on a community, and the importance of remaining informed about community and national issues are all significantly stronger than these attitudes

She continued, describing how her community experiences had led her to believe that "if you really want to achieve it, you can somehow make a difference."

Preliminary survey results also suggest that students' involvement in particular activities affects their attitudes toward their self-efficacy, the value of commitment to the public good, and levels of community and national knowledge. Even after compensating for the variance due to a student's level of civic involvement in high school (their research group), students' level of involvement in community service activities is a significant predictor of their viewpoint on self-efficacy through

community service and the value of and commitment to the public good. More specifically, a student's level of involvement in community service activities is the most influential factor in determining his or her level of belief in the ability to evoke positive developments in a community through community service. In addition, students' level of involvement in political activities is a significant predictor of their viewpoint on their own self-efficacy through politics and awareness of and interest in community and national issues. In particular, students' participation in political activities has had the largest effect on their attitudes toward the need to acquire information and remain informed on community and national issues.

Qualitative data have substantiated the survey findings. Interviewees noted that participation in specific activities increased their awareness of civic or political issues. For example, one interviewee commented that her on-campus volunteer activity had "increased my awareness of issues that are important." Participation in particular activities also increased some students' involvement in and concern about their community. For example, one interviewee noted that his off-campus volunteering opportunity at a free clinic has "definitely opened my eyes" to the issues of affordable health care faced by a large population of individuals in Boston's metropolitan area. Similarly, another interviewee indicated that the opportunity to "perform in various communities" through a community-based activity "raised my awareness about some of the things that are going on."

Although this longitudinal study is still in its early stages, with data collection scheduled to continue into 2012, preliminary findings suggest some important results: (1) Students' participation in civic engagement activities and their acquisition of positive civic engagement attitudes have been found to differ based on participation in the CPS Scholars Program and students' levels of participation in community service in high school.

(2) Specific civic engagement activities predict students' development of civic competence. These initial results suggest that involvement in civic engagement activities can affect students' civic and political attitudes, a finding that could substantiate the need for institutions of higher education to promote these types of activities. These findings, which already allude to a link between students' engagement in activities and their adoption of positive civic engagement attitudes, will help Tufts and other universities shape and direct programs that enhance student commitment to civically engaged lives. ■

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