Preaching to the Apathetic and Uninterested: Teaching Civic Engagement to Freshmen and Non-Majors

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Introduction

In this article we draw from our introductory political science courses that teach civic engagement to freshman and non-majors in order to suggest that our experiences at Jesuit-run Seattle University could hold some clues to invigorating democratic citizenship among young Americans. In teaching a course, titled “Citizenship”, we have adopted an educational philosophy based on the idea that “democracy is not merely exercising the right to vote, but rather an obligation to engage in careful consideration and discussion for the purpose of creating a better life” (Ross 2004, 249).

Our introductory political science courses have multiple goals:

- to study the theoretical nature of citizenship in a democracy
- to expose the impediments to democratic citizenship
- to foster an understanding of the various ways in which one can participate in the American political system through the use of service learning and other innovative pedagogies
- to examine examples of citizen engagement that may challenge preconceptions about the forms and forums of democratic participation
- to demonstrate to undergraduates how political science takes civic engagement seriously.

We begin this article with the widespread and prescient concern among those in higher education, including our discipline of political science, that civic disengagement has taken a real foothold in our culture. We bring together concerns about civic disengagement within the discipline of political science with concerns about unmotivated students within the literature on teaching and learning in order to lay out both what is at stake, and to suggest how our courses fit within these concerns. We then discuss the target audience for our citizenship course, and how the course fits into the core curriculum at Seattle University.

While we see the purpose of this course as part of the broader concerns with fostering civic engagement in students, there are also important aspects of our personal and institutional experiences that motivate how we approach the course. Subsequently, we independently present our methods for teaching citizenship, focusing on the texts we use, activities we design, and assessment techniques we utilize. By examining the literature, as well as student feedback and reflections on our teaching, we offer insight into what we found to be both successful and unsuccessful pedagogical practices. We conclude by offering recommendations based on our experiences, and call for long-term analyses of how similar courses and initiatives might be adopted as part the effort to foster civic education.

The Importance and Challenges of Teaching Civic Engagement

The concern with declining levels of civic engagement has received increased attention and is focused primarily on three levels: The content and curriculum of social studies in high schools (e.g. Westheimer and Kahne 2004; Ross 2004; and Galston 2004), teaching and engaging students in civic engagement in the higher education context (e.g. Jacoby et al. 2009 and Association of American Colleges and...
Indeed, the American Political Science Association (APSA) as well as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) have noted the critical need to incorporate civic education in university-wide curricula (See also Lazare 2010). To date, over 500 college and university presidents—from two- to four-year institutions as well as public and private—have endorsed the Campus Compact’s (2007) “Presidents’ Declarations on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education,” which notes the urgent need for higher education to address the disengagement of college students from democratic participation. The American Political Science Association also sounded the alarm with its Task Force on Civic Education in the 21st Century’s (1998) statement that, “current levels of political knowledge, political engagement, and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in the United States.” In addition, the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ publication “Liberal Education” devoted its Spring 2011 issue to the topic of “Civic Engagement and Psychosocial Well-Being.” It opened with a president’s message titled, “Civic Learning in College: Our Best Investment in the Future of Our Democracy,” that enunciated the need for civic learning as part of a general university education. The remainder of the issue addressed not only the psychosocial benefits of civic engagement for university students, but also the current status of research regarding youth civic engagement and the importance of public work in this endeavor. Other scholars, such as Barbara Jacoby et al.’s (2009) Civic Engagement in Higher Education, Anne Colby et al.’s (2007) Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement, and John Saltmarsh and Edward Zlotkowski’s (2011) Higher Education and Democracy: Essays on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement have addressed the need for, and mechanics of, civic education in the university setting.

The seemingly herculean task of engaging apathetic and uninterested freshmen and non-political science majors in civic engagement has also received popular and scholarly attention over the past few years. Literature about growing student apathy amongst the millennial generation has been popularized by authors including Neil Howe & William Strauss (2000) in Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation and Jean M. Twenge and Keith Campbell (2009) in The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement. This includes what have been coined the seven core traits that are emblematic of the millennial generation:

special, protected, team-oriented, achievement-oriented, pressured, confident, and conventional (Howe and Strauss 2000 & 2003).

Although these books have received much popular attention we do not find them a helpful device for scholarly discussion, but rather utilize them as a heuristic to think about what is helpful to students in general regardless of their generation. The most useful information for reaching these students is in the well-developed scholarly teaching and learning literature about motivating and engaging new, uninterested and other students in learning as well as previously discussed literature regarding civic education. According to Ambrose, et al. (2010) motivation is highest if students value the goals and have positive expectancies for success along with a perceived supportive environment. Thus, it is important to utilize strategies to establish value and build positive expectancies. Some of the suggested strategies to establish value include connecting the material to students’ interest, providing authentic real-world tasks, showing relevance to students’ current academic lives, and the instructor showing their own passion and enthusiasm for the discipline. Kuh et al. (2005) note the value of having civic engagement expressed as a cultural value that is integrated into the campus culture. Here, campus support for service and civic engagement through internships or other forms of experiential learning, such as service learning, adds to the value of civic engagement as a goal for students. For example, the direct service learning model, where students take an introductory course with a service learning component, provides an immediate vehicle for integration of service and learning (Dallimore et al. 2010). Other literature provides suggestions for engaging first and second-year students as well as general techniques for engaging and motivating students (Barkeley 2010). Accordingly, this article brings together literature from political science and teaching and learning, to analyze student feedback and critically reflect upon our experiences teaching an introductory political science course titled “Citizenship,” designed to educate freshmen and other non-political science majors about civic engagement.

Purpose of Citizenship Course

At Seattle University, Citizenship is an introductory course taught to freshmen and non-political science majors as part of a series of liberal studies courses called the core curriculum. Our student body numbers approximately 8,000, more than half of whom are undergraduates. The core curriculum introduces all students to the Jesuit educational tradition. It has three goals:

- “To develop the whole person for a life of service”
- “To provide a foundation for questioning and learning in any major profession throughout one’s entire life”
- “To give a common intellectual experience to all Seattle University students.”

The distinctive characteristic of the core curriculum is its focus on a sense of social and personal responsibility. Thus, the value of civic engagement through public service serves as an integral part of the campus culture.

Rethinking Intro to Political Science

Every political science department offers an introductory course for the major and some, such as Seattle University, offer an introductory course as part of their university’s general requirements. Our experience teaching Citizenship as an introductory political science course to freshmen and non-majors engenders its own set of difficulties. Most students who take the Citizenship course are freshmen, but there
There are three main reasons we have selected separate teaching reflections as the means to discuss our courses. First, though both housed within the discipline of political science, we approached the course from different subfields (Mello primarily from a political theory lens, and Davis from an American politics/public law lens). Consequently, the texts that we used differed more than they overlapped, and we felt it was important to highlight these differences in approach. Second, we each employed a range of techniques designed to motivate our students to explore questions of civic engagement in a number of ways. Here, again, some of these—like the incorporation of service learning—overlapped, but others differed. Indeed, even where they overlapped, such as our use of film in the course, we drew from divergent sources. The detailed reflections below allow us to clarify our individual approaches. Finally, utilizing reflections on our teaching allows us to express the reasoning behind our pedagogical choices; to forecast our expectations for specific texts and techniques; and to reflect on what we found to have worked well and what to have fallen short of our expectations. Our goal in using these teaching reflections to highlight these similarities and differences is not to suggest that we found one version of the course ‘better’ than others, but rather to highlight for the reader the array of pedagogical techniques, and the variety of texts from which we drew in order to engage our students.

Throughout the reflections we have sought to incorporate the voices of our students in order to share how they interpreted their experiences in the course. To do this we draw on three main sources: students’ responses to a post-course survey; students’ responses on course evaluations; and students’ responses on course assignments. Together, these offer us a qualitative means to tentatively assess our courses. We opted for an open-ended set of survey questions (see Appendix A) because we thought it was the best means for soliciting individual reflections from students in order to reveal how they interpreted their experiences in our courses. In essence, the survey was designed to allow our former students to tell their personal stories about the texts and experiences they had in the class. We draw on these stories as a means to show how some of our students developed meaning out of their class experiences. We were interested in seeing if their meaning-making matched up with our expectations for the course.

There were, we believed, two important limitations that drove us toward qualitative, rather than quantitative means for assessing these concerns.

Foremost, even though we taught this class on multiple occasions, the size of each class was relatively small (at most 20 students). Consequently we were always working with a rather small sample size. Indeed, even when we contacted all of our former students with our survey questions, the relatively low response rate, we felt, made it difficult for us make any definitive claims about larger trends. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, while we were interested in measuring the impact of our course on our students’ conceptions of civic engagement in general and their individual roles as citizens in particular, we realized that to do so would require us to track these students’ perceptions over time. For instance, if we could have identified movement among these students’ perceptions of citizenship from the time they entered our courses to the time they graduated as seniors, we might be able to say something more definitive about the impact of this course. Still, even if we had the means to carry out such an analysis, we ultimately felt it would be difficult to isolate the impact of our course from any number of other variables (friendships; other courses; larger campaigns; major political events that affected them personally; etc.) that might affect their changing perceptions of themselves as citizens.

In the following sections, we reflect on teaching the Citizenship course. Our reflections will focus first on our motivation for engaging these questions, then turn to course content and pedagogy, and conclude by drawing from student input on the effectiveness of our approaches to the teaching of citizenship to freshmen and non-political science majors.

Teaching Reflections of Brian Mello

My interest in citizenship and civic engagement stems both from my own personal history of activism, and from my research of the Turkish labor movement. As an undergraduate, I was involved with political campaigns in Connecticut, as well as with efforts to unionize the janitorial staff at Fairfield University. As a graduate student, I served on the organizing committee for the Graduate Student Employee Action Committee, the organization that led the effort to form a union for graduate student employees at the University of Washington. This activism shaped my intellectual interests and exposed me to the reality of collective action problems. Later, while I was conducting my dissertation research in Turkey in the spring of 2004, I had a conversation with several union officials who had come of age during the 1970s, contentious times in the history of Turkish labor activism. One organizer confided that his son, who was about my age, wanted nothing to do with unions or politics in general. Indeed, disengagement and disillusionment with politics is not strictly an American phenomenon.

When I returned from Turkey, I was offered an adjunct position at Seattle University, and the chance to teach an introduction to political science course targeted primarily at freshmen and non-majors. To me, teaching the Citizenship course was an opportunity to explore with undergraduates what it means to be a member of a political community, why so many young people throughout the world appear to
be politically uninterested and apathetic, and how political science can take questions of citizenship and civic engagement more seriously.

As an introductory course, this was an ideal place to draw together the different strands of political science—focusing on both normative and empirical aspects of citizenship, and to incorporate service learning pedagogy in order to provide an experiential component for this academic exploration. My central thesis in this course was that politics is about the collective effort to come up with answers to questions of who we are, what kind of world we want to live in, and how we should act to bring this vision about. In a democracy, I argued, the answers to these questions are debated and forged out of the active political participation of citizens. Consequently, I would tell my students that whether they have an interest in politics or not, democratic citizens ought to have a compelling interest in the processes by which answers to political questions emerge. This course, therefore, examined the essence of politics and the importance of political participation.

Although I taught this course several times, I made changes to the syllabus each time. I always divided the course into three sections, focusing on questions of civic engagement, social justice, and the meaning of politics, and used service learning as a pedagogical tool to enhance students' understanding of these concepts. The course began with political philosophy and philosophical considerations of democracy, citizenship, and participation. I presented my students with three philosophical takes on what it means to be a citizen: Aristotle’s rather exclusionary view; the spiritual view of Italian fascism; and various versions of democratic theory. My hope was that students would accept the centrality of politics, come to understand why fascism is dangerously appealing, and realize that the only alternative is robust democratic participation. On more than one occasion, however, I have read essays defending the fascist theory of citizenship as the answer to declining levels of participation in the U.S. Originally, I used Hannah Arendt (1958) and Benjamin Barber (2003) to explore how politics might be part of the human condition, and how the philosophical foundations of American liberalism need to be augmented by a stronger version of democracy. But, for students with little prior interest in questions of civic engagement, these texts were too abstract and too complex. Consequently, I moved to a combination of Dewey’s (1934) democratic theory and Iris Marion Young’s (1995) call for communicative democracy in order to defend the merits of democratic citizenship.

The second part of the course moved to an empirical analysis of citizen (in)activism in Vancouver, British Columbia, and in the contemporary United States. Here, I used Michael Brown’s (1997) political geography of AIDS activism in Vancouver as a bridge between the theoretical and the empirical. In locating radical democratic citizenship in counter-intuitive places, Brown’s text challenges students to think about where citizenship can and does take place. For Brown, radical democratic citizenship is less often found in the antagonism between actors distinctly located in the state, society, or the family; it more often involves activities that blur the boundaries of these spheres. For example, Brown spends an entire chapter discussing how public memorials like the AIDS quilt can provide a space for exploring who we are and what kind of world we want to live in. During this section, I also focused on the state of civic engagement in contemporary American politics. To accomplish this task, I relied on both the serious (assigning at various times Bowling Alone, Better Together, and Democracy at Risk), and the satirical (discussing the political satire of The Daily Show and America the Book). Finally, I concluded the course by demonstrating how political science can take citizenship more seriously. I have done this both by examining Doug McAdam’s (1999) study of the rise and decline of black insurgency, and by evaluating the WTO protests in Seattle.

In an effort to augment the more scholarly texts, I experimented with a number of non-traditional texts. At the conclusion of the first section of the course, I sought more provocative (yet perhaps obtuse) takes on the meaning of political life. In some iterations of the course, I screened for my students My Dinner With Andre, and asked them to think about whether Wallace Shaw’s pursuit of security and material well-being is more attractive to them than Andre Gregory’s provocations to act boldy (even if bizarrely). In other iterations, we read Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (one time watching it performed in a local theater). Here, too, I engaged my students in a discussion of what it means to withdraw from political life, and asked them to consider whether or not this may be one of Beckett’s arguments in confronting the audience with the increasing absurdity of modern life. In addition, in dissecting the rich and potentially intimidating analysis of Bowling Alone, I screened the films Crash and Bowling for Columbine. Both films have their limitations, yet they also present arguments that can easily be compared with Putnam’s (2000) claims about declining levels of social capital. Finally, I used short documentary film segments to augment specific readings. For instance, I used segments from a documentary on the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, as well as clips of direct action posted online by ACT-UP, New York.

Students generally responded more positively to the texts on American politics than they did to works of political theory. One student reported, “I still have my copy of Bowling Alone. I’d like to reread it since I skimmed over a lot of it the first time around. It’s an amazing book and it really got me thinking about what kind of citizen I was or am. It was extremely easy to identify myself and my friends and family in the kinds of people the book discussed. Definitely my favorite book from the course.” Another student focused on the WTO demonstrations and use of film, stating, “I love the concepts of cosmopolitan views and demonstrations from WTO in Seattle was the most memorable [aspect of the course] along with all the videos you showed us because the course themes we studied were clarified in the first-hand account taken in a historical context.”

In order to put citizenship into practice and explore the course topics in “real-world settings,” I utilized service learning as a required component to the course. For each section of the course, I worked with Seattle University’s Center for Service and Community Engagement in order to identify a list of local organizations that were in need of volunteers. I specifically sought out general organizations and not necessarily "political" organizations in order to challenge students to think expansively about what civic engagement might entail. This choice allowed students to identify similarities with and differences between their service learning sites and the allegedly "non-political" organizations pointed out in course texts. Due to the constraints of the quarter system, students were only asked to volunteer for 18 to 20 hours throughout the 10-week course. On some level, therefore, this type of service learning is not ideally designed to foster political engagement. As Macedo et al. point out, “successful service learning programs … consciously engage teachers and students in civic outcomes and not merely academic performance; they allow students to work on public policy issues; they give students
a choice about their community service; they help them to see results within a reasonable amount of time; they provide regular opportunities for reflection on the service work; and they allow students to pursue explicitly political projects and outcomes” (2005, 126).

Aware of these limitations, I tried to use them as a teaching device. In paper assignments, for example, I had my students do structured reflections that explored how their service learning did or did not fulfill these criteria, and to discuss whether or not these experiences had done anything to enhance their political efficacy.

I specifically sought to relate the service learning to other course texts. For instance, I asked students to examine the extent to which their organizations empowered those who used their services, rather than treat them simply as clients. I also asked them to find out about the leadership and decision-making structure of their organizations to evaluate the extent to which decisions are made democratically or are hierarchically imposed. In his analysis of AIDS activism, Brown introduces the concept of the shadow state—a concept that captures the blurred boundaries between state and society that results from state funding of civil society organizations. Thus, I asked my students to find out how their service learning organizations were funded.

In my experience, student responses to service learning were mixed. Some students were excited by what they were asked to do, and as a result tended to participate more willingly. One student affirmed, “I think that the required service learning was a great part of the class. It makes you get in and look at the politics in whatever you are doing.” On the other hand, when I presented my students with a paper topic that asked them to make an argument about the extent to which their service learning experiences promoted civic engagement, or developed a sense of political efficacy, I received some illuminating responses.

One student wrote:

My service learning at Spruce Street SCRC does not promote civic engagement. My specific tasks do not build social capital, teach civic skills, or increase political knowledge. I have been assigned an administrative position. I volunteer at Spruce Street SCRC every Monday for about two hours, and I do the same thing every week. My job is to enter the names of the youth who are brought to the center by date into the data base, and then enter admittance and discharge information from the youth’s file. I work alone at a computer. Although I believe that my mundane tasks at Spruce Street SCRC allow others the time to do more important things, I do not gain any sense of efficacy from my service learning. As Macedo argues in his book, volunteering should build social capital. Because my tasks at Spruce Street SCRC do not involve any interaction with others, I do not build any social capital through my service learning. My tasks also do not teach me any of the valuable civic skills outlined by Macedo. Knowing how to input data into the computer does not encourage me to participate in politics!

Finally, my service learning does not increase my political knowledge. The local nature of the work done at Spruce Street SCRC in general does not have a clear link to politics; my specific tasks do not allow me to see the effects even on the local level.

The primary goal for this course as I stated in my syllabus was that, "by the end of this course students should have developed a better understanding of what politics is, as well as why and how the political participation of democratic citizens is crucial. In addition, students should be able to understand how political science can systematically study the importance of citizenship." I geared my assessment of student learning with this goal in mind. Primarily, I assessed my students through three assignments specifically geared toward developing critical responses to the course readings and toward requiring the application of central ideas from the readings to the students’ service learning experiences.

Since many students only enroll in these classes because it fulfills part of their core requirements, we have sought to develop activities that can better engage students in the subject of civic engagement. One activity involved a group project wherein groups of students were responsible for preparing an executive summary and group presentation about one of three aspects of civic engagement in Seattle. The groups focused on the construction of branch libraries in Seattle, key issues of urban planning in Seattle, and the WTO protests. Each group was to research its topic, which often involved interviews and off-campus visits. They developed arguments about how their topic related to the state of civic engagement in Seattle. I devoted several class periods to the groups, allowing them to develop research strategies and the time to prepare their presentations.

Of the nearly sixty students that I taught in this class, some gave hope that this project had an enduring effect. One student said, “I believe this course has changed my views of politics and the vital need for people to take responsibility as citizens in the community, since I have learned about the dangers of declining citizenship and civic engagement. I will be sure to be aware and engaged in playing my part as a citizen in the political community because our future depends on it.” Another student stated, “I certainly think about politics much more than I did prior to taking the class, though I am not any more involved. I make it a point now to keep up on current events and I try to be aware of things that are taking place in the world. I realize more and more that it’s pretty normal for people to be completely oblivious and complacent.”

Despite the different tactics outlined above, debate and discussion in class were never as forthcoming as I would have liked. Indeed, in their course evaluations, students expressed their most common concern with the lack of “debate.” Consequently, despite the positive responses from some students, the general lack of enthusiasm leaves me asking: Is there more that I can do to inspire political interest in freshmen and non-majors, or is this simply an uphill battle destined to have moderate success?

*Teaching Reflections of Angelique Davis*
I chose to teach Citizenship because of my own activism and former career as a labor and employment attorney. I grew up hearing stories about the civil rights struggles in the South and the impact it had on my family. Listening to their stories of segregation and their experiences as African-Americans during Jim Crow and the civil rights movement spurred my desire to become an attorney. Even today, I am moved by the realization that these stories of lynching, stolen property, job discrimination and other injustices are not in our distant past. These accounts spurred my own student activism in numerous campus organizations. A former law student extern at the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Civil Rights, I worked on Title VI environmental justice claims. From my work at both the regional and national level on environmental justice issues, it was apparent that those who made the most noise were heard.

A large part of my law practice included employment discrimination cases— in both the private and public sectors. My work in this area was as a defense attorney. I chose this path because I was able to influence corporate clients to do the “right thing” when dealing with diversity in the workplace. After a few years in this practice, however, I began to question my role and began to feel that my career was between the Scylla of never-ending discrimination claims and the Charybdis of unjust legislation. Thus, my transition to academia was, in part, to remove myself from the day-to-day cavalcade of clients to questioning the responsiveness of the law to social problems. My hope is that through my scholarship and teaching I may inspire others to question the status quo and participate in shaping our collective future.

When standing before a class of mostly apathetic and uninterested freshmen and non–majors, I employed multiple teaching styles and media, which included service learning as a necessary component. During the first third of my course, students learned the fundamentals of citizen participation and why it is important. This segment must be included because, unfortunately, most of my students have not learned this information in their high school civics course (if they even had such a course). We utilized Janda’s (2006) The Challenge of Democracy to cover the areas of public opinion, political socialization and the media, participation and voting, political parties campaigns and elections, and interest groups. The initial section aimed to give the students a foundation for the remainder of the course.

I used technology extensively to teach Janda’s text. Most class sessions included a PowerPoint lecture and a group activity. Often the group activity included some type of student survey—so the class could measure themselves against the general population. Almost daily, I would show media clips relevant to the topic of the day. I played these online clips using an overhead projector.

The Internet sources I utilized to find these clips included the Web sites of major television networks, National Public Radio, and local media stations. These clips educated students on how to view the news, stimulated class discussion and helped students apply the text to the world around them. For example, my classes did Ideological assessments in which they predicted their political ideologies and then took two online tests to clarify their ideologies. As part of this assignment, they wrote a paper about the political socialization factors, such as education, wealth, race, gender, region that shaped their ideologies. We use elections to discuss the entire electoral process and analyze the impact of the media on political participation.

After learning the fundamentals of citizen participation in Janda’s text, my students read Putnam’s (2000) Bowling Alone. On some occasions, I have had students read the entire book, but found this largely ineffective over time as most students did not do all of the reading. As one student said, “This text takes hundreds of pages to say what could be said in ten.” Of course, my response was that this was a political science course and that this type of research must be conducted to support Putnam’s conclusions. The response to this was a sigh while the student slid down into his desk—as if to say “Whatever. Let’s just get this over with.” Despite this initial reaction, however, former students frequently indicated that they remember the main concepts set forth in Bowling Alone and recognized the importance and impact of social capital on their daily lives.

To teach Bowling Alone, I utilized brief lectures, group activities, case studies, and service learning. An effective group activity was a mock “party” in which students learned about the value of informal social connections through interviewing each other about whether or not they were a “macher” or a “schmoozer” (Putnam 2000, 93–115). My use of films for case studies also proved effective. It amazed me how students clapped and cheered every time I announced that we are doing a case study of the popular film Office Space to study connections in the workplace. For this class segment, I provided the class with a series of questions to answer while they analyzed the film. After the film, the class discussed the film based upon their answers to the questions I provided. I also utilized this method with other films such as Crash, American History X, Jesus Camp, North Country, or Do the Right Thing to teach about social capital.

My course also covered political participation through litigation. My classes read Bingham and Gansler’s (2002) book Class Action: The Story of Lois Jenson and the Landmark Case That Changed Sexual Harassment Law, about the first sexual harassment class-action lawsuit, as an example of an individual’s ability to significantly change society through the legal system. This text is also an excellent example of the ‘dark side’ of social capital addressed in Putnam’s book. For a few of these classes, Jean Boler, the lead attorney who worked on this case and a former colleague of mine, spoke to my class about her experiences.

Multimedia presentations are crucial for these students who walk into class talking to their friends on cell phones, listening to their iPods, text messaging or instant messaging friends, or using wireless Internet to search for the answer to a question posed during class. These students spend a significant amount of their time on the Internet and use technology regularly. Thus, I utilized PowerPoint presentations, media clips, music, online oral arguments, film and interactive Internet presentations during class.
My classes frequently required at least 18 hours of service learning. Our campus has a Center for Service and Community Engagement that helped facilitate the students' service-learning experience. Each student picked an organization, with my approval, for their service learning experience. I allowed each student to pick their own organization so that they were more invested in the experience. Initially, many students appeared to resent having to fit service learning into their already busy schedules. By mid-quarter, however, students appear generally satisfied with the experience and understood how their service learning experience contributes to the success of our democracy. One student indicated, “To be honest, while we were in the class I did not like being forced to volunteer. However, looking back, I am glad I contributed over twenty hours of service work. I definitely learned from the experience and I am able to use my service learning on resumes, my college applications, and I recently wrote a paper that referenced the experience.” It is also interesting to note that some students continued volunteering with their service-learning site after the course ended. I integrated their service learning experience with the texts through a series of reflective papers and through discussion of their service learning on Citizenship Days.

Each week, usually on Friday, my classes had what I call Citizenship Day. Students brought a newspaper article from The Seattle Times, which is distributed free of charge on campus, or another reputable news source. For this class session, each student summarized his/her article, updated the class on their service learning, and explained how both related to the course. I discovered that once students warmed up to this exercise, it was the most popular, and memorable, segment of the class. Inevitably, the articles turned into a class discussion in which students actively engaged in learning about current events and in political dialogue. Most of my students indicated that they never, or rarely, read a paper until they took my class. One student indicated, “I have to admit that before the class I never picked up a newspaper. However, listening to the articles of other students and having to bring my own articles forced me to engage in social capital and become more aware of political and international issues.” Another student indicated:

I would say the greatest thing I have gotten out of this class would be my attention to the news. Along with getting older and becoming adult, the weekly newspaper articles that we would have to analyze have given me a habit of checking what is going on in the world especially with things like the rebuilding of New Orleans. I am no genius but I do feel capable of having a decent conversation about the reactions of people in the media and society about how the recovery is going in that part of the country.

In my experience, Citizenship Day was a way to keep students actively engaged in the learning process and, hopefully, to develop their interest in being informed citizens.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Trends of civic disengagement have become a central part of empirical and theoretical studies in political science as well as other disciplines, and there has been a steady effort to identify ways to address these trends. Still, we believe political scientists in general have paid insufficient attention to the ways in which courses targeted at college freshmen and non–majors can play a role in this process. And, although there is broad support for civic education within university curricula much needs to be done. Throughout this article, we used our experiences teaching civic engagement at a small liberal arts college to reflect on provocative teaching strategies and the effective use of service learning. By using student feedback and evaluations, we also sought to illustrate why some strategies are more effective than others. Though it feels at times like we are preaching to the apathetic and uninterested, we believe this type of course can be a potentially helpful tool for addressing the negative trends in civic engagement. It’s difficult to assess the long–term implications of this course on the future civic engagement of students who have taken it; the population number is simply too small, and the time elapsed simply not long enough. Consequently, we conclude by offering three recommendations for the future.

First, we believe other college campuses and departments ought to rethink introduction to political science and other core courses along the lines of these themes. We would like to see more courses and more faculty devoted to teaching the importance of civic engagement to freshmen and non–political science majors. Within political science, we believe this is an opportunity to stretch the way members of the discipline present complex empirical and theoretical work to a broader population.

Second, insofar as there are other faculty members on campuses across the country teaching similar courses targeted at similar student populations, we believe there is a need for long–term, cross–campus studies of their impact.

Third, to stimulate the proliferation of introductory political science courses and other core education courses that emphasize the importance of civic engagement, we believe that there is a need to develop curriculum and service–learning opportunities to help teach these courses. Currently, there are a number of books and articles that can be patched together to form a class; however, there are no comprehensive teaching aids or texts for this type of course in most disciplines. Moreover, the time commitment required to pull together such a curriculum, the effort it takes to create more effective service learning opportunities, and the overall risk to engage in a rethinking of how to approach civic engagement within introductory political science courses and other core classes are often unrewarded by the existing faculty development and evaluation processes on many campuses.

Our hope is that these recommendations will add to the current literature and stimulate further discourse regarding the value of civic education and service learning in university curricula and, ultimately, increase our students' level of civic engagement.

**Appendix A**

In assessing the effectiveness of our teaching strategies, we distributed the following e–mail to students formerly enrolled in our
Dear prior PLSC 120 students:

I am currently writing a conference paper about teaching the citizenship course you took. I am interested in your feedback on this course. If you are willing to respond to the following two questions I would be most grateful. If you are interested in responding, I ask that you get back to me by the end of January. You may feel free to email me your response. However, you should note that if you do answer these questions I will not use any identifying information in my paper and presentation. I will simply note you as “one student.” That is, I will not use your name, year in school, sex, etc. in my paper. If remaining anonymous in your response is something you wish to do, feel free to print out your response and drop them off in my mailbox. If you have any questions about this paper, where it will be presented, or anything else, do not hesitate to contact me.

Please answer honestly and as thoroughly as you wish:

1. Can you recall any specific texts, concepts, activities, films, paper topics, or other aspects of this class that you found particularly memorable, useful, or unhelpful?

2. If at all, do you feel this class changed the way you think about, or your involvement in, politics and civic engagement? If so, what changed? If not, why not?

Thanks, in advance.

References


Footnotes

1 The Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership’s definition of civic engagement includes “acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities” (2005). See also Jacoby et al. (2008) for a brief history of civic engagement in higher education.

2 The Political Science Department at Seattle University recently voted to change the name of the course from “Citizenship” to “People, Power and Politics” based upon student feedback that the former name was more attractive to students. The course description and goals remain the same.
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See also Hunter et al., (2010), who notes that sophomore students do necessarily include students of the same generation, goals, or residential status and that it is important to examine how service learning impacts the development, academic and career choices of different groups of students, and to keep this in mind when utilizing research regarding service-learning.

The following reflection is based upon my time teaching at Seattle University. I have since transitioned to a new position at Muhlenberg College, and have not yet had the opportunity to replicate this course at my new institution.

I focused on these topic areas because they dovetailed with readings from the course. The role of branch libraries in Chicago and urban planning in Portland and Boston are particularly featured by Putnam and Feldstein (2004) as examples of restoring the American community. In addition, I had the city councilor who presides over Seattle’s urban planning committee discuss with my class his views on the role of urban planning and civic engagement in Seattle. For the WTO protests we read a book written by a Seattle-area resident who participated in the protest (Thomas 2000).

This book was recently made into the popular film North Country (Warner Bros. 2005) starring Charlize Theron, Sissy Spacek and Woody Harrelson.

For the film reenactment of the Jensen v. Eveleth Mines case Warner Brothers chose Woody Harrelson (who is male) to portray Jean Boler (who is female) in the movie North Country.

To teach the Korematsu case I utilize various teaching materials as quite a few are available. A memorable event for the class included the time when Karen Korematsu, the daughter of Fred Korematsu the plaintiff, spoke to the class about her experiences and the experiences of her deceased father.

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CALL FOR ARTICLES
The Journal for Civic Commitment (JCC) will be asking for submissions to be considered for the Fall 2015 issue of the journal. Though JCC is particularly interested in work on service-learning in community colleges, articles from faculty and staff at all types of colleges and universities, as well as articles from community
Authentic Youth Civic Engagement invites young people to participate in the democratic process through meaningful roles in public policy, planning and decision-making, which can lead to improved outcomes for youth and the community. AYCE thrives in a climate of reciprocity and respect where young people, in partnership with adults, are prepared and supported to tackle relevant issues and effect change. The AYCE framework presents four critical elements for a successful initiative. Even if the city already has a number of youth engagement activities, these beginning steps will contribute to the development and sustainability of the AYCE initiative. A Framework for Authentic Youth Civic Engagement. AYCE Definition. To be sure, anxiety about the civic engagement of young adults is nothing new, and its persistence is easy to understand. As far back as solid evidence can be found, at any given historical moment, young adults have tended to be less attached to civic life than are their parents and grandparents. It is not difficult to explain this gap. Today's entering freshmen are reporting significantly increased levels of volunteering in their senior year of high school, a trend that seems to be carrying over to their early college years (Sax et al 1998, 1999). But only a fraction of today's young volunteers believe that they will continue this practice through their college years and into the paid workforce. The major findings may be summarized as follows: The seemingly herculean task of engaging apathetic and uninterested freshmen and non-political science majors in civic engagement has also received popular and scholarly attention over the past few years. Literature about growing student apathy amongst the millennial generation has been popularized by authors including Neil Howe & William Strauss (2000) in Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation and Jean M. Twenge and Keith Campbell (2009) in The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement. Our experience teaching Citizenship as an introductory political science course to freshmen and non-majors engenders its own set of difficulties.