

The Lasting Impact of College on Young Adults' Civic and Political Engagement

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Abstract:

This paper explores the ways in which colleges and universities foster social responsibility by examining college experiences that encourage students' civic and political engagement. More specifically, this paper examines certain college environments and experiences, including community service activities, interaction with diverse peers, diversity coursework, and religious involvement to explore their impact on developing and maintaining socially responsible values and behaviors six years after leaving college. Multiple measures of post-college civic and political engagement are utilized. Researchers conclude with implications for the ways in which colleges and universities can provide curricular and co-curricular opportunities for their students to become socially responsible citizens – well into the post-college years.

Introduction

Renewed attention is being given to examining the role of educational institutions in preparing students to assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society (Astin, 1997; Barber, 2001; Galston, 2004; McDonnell and Timpane & Benjamin, 2000; Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Saltmarsh, 1996). Historically, educational institutions have played a fundamental role in cultivating an educated citizenry to be politically and civically engaged in a democratic society (Barber, 1992; Dewey, 1944; Saltmarsh, 1996). In fact, education for these purposes was a primary rationale for the creation of public education in the U.S. (Galston, 2001). While these efforts were initially focused on primary and secondary schooling, in more recent years expanded access to postsecondary education has resulted in an increased focus on, and scrutiny of, the role that universities and colleges play in furthering these civic purposes.

At present, a number of researchers in higher education have provided frameworks to study the civic capacities and motivations of *students* (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hurtado, Engberg & Ponjuan, 2003; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Sax, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In addition, other studies have examined civic engagement in the *general*

populace (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002; Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 1999; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This study is informed by both bodies of scholarly work – in order to better explain what college experiences might be of consequence in stimulating civic engagement well into the post-college years.

Literature Review

Civic and Political Engagement

There is a vast amount of literature on civic engagement - a term that is often conceptualized in subtle yet different ways depending upon the disciplinary influence. The definition of civic engagement can be used to broadly encompass voluntary community service *as well as* engagement that is more political in nature. Therefore the term “civically engaged” should be interpreted in a fairly inclusive fashion for this study and includes activities such as voluntary coaching for a children’s soccer league or volunteering as a canvasser for a political campaign. The term political engagement is used in this paper when the type of engagement is intended to influence policy or political action. In addition, Boyte and Kari (1996) note that studies of civic engagement should encompass a broad spectrum of individual values and actions. Accordingly, a rich set of indicators is used to measure various facets of post-college civic and political engagement in this paper.

It is widely agreed that the level of formal education is the single most powerful predictor of civic engagement (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2000; Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Putnam, 1996). What is less well understood is exactly what

it is about formal education that has this effect. At present, there is more interest in enriching our understanding of why formal education is such a strong predictor of civic engagement. Because of the relationship between formal education and civic engagement, it was expected by many that as the formal educational levels of citizens in the United States increased it would result in concomitant increases in civic and political engagement. However, while the level of formal education has indeed risen tremendously over the past 40 years in the United States - with a higher proportion of citizens graduating from high school and college now than ever before - a parallel increase in political engagement has not surfaced (Galston, 2004; Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). This has led many researchers to question: What particular aspects of formal education might actually affect civic and political engagement?

A main area of this inquiry is on the role of curriculum in developing civic skills and possibly motivations necessary to prepare students for civic engagement. Historically, there has been contention over the efficacy of the civic curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. Earlier research seemed to indicate that taking courses with a civic focus did little to improve a student's civic knowledge or motivation for participation (Niemi & Junn, 1998). However, more recent research indicates that while student background characteristics are indeed important predictors (such as income and parental education) that the civics curriculum also enhances what, and how much, students in high school know about American government and politics (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Likewise, at the college level, Nie and Hillygus (2001) found that the social science curriculum had a positive effect on awareness of public issues, political

engagement, and volunteerism. Curriculum has therefore been shown to affect civic engagement at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

In higher education, required diversity coursework (a course or series of courses that focuses on issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) has become much more common in universities across the country. Chang (2002) notes that the rationale for such coursework is a belief that it may help develop students' ability to think more critically about differences in U.S. society. By understanding differences, students are better equipped to embrace, negotiate, and work with individuals from various cultural backgrounds (Chang, 2002; Mahoney & Schamber, 2004). Research suggests that coursework on diversity may shift students' attitudes toward racial groups (Chang, 2002), increase the likelihood of their reporting positive cross-racial experiences (Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005), and help nurture students' intercultural sensitivity (Mahoney & Schamber, 2004). Therefore, research on diversity curriculum demonstrates that taking diversity courses may nurture cross-cultural sensitivities and understandings to help students live and work in an increasingly multicultural democracy.

Outside of curriculum only a few other areas have been extensively explored to ascertain the relationship between post-secondary education and civic engagement. One of these areas is pedagogy. For example, the pedagogical practice of service-learning has been studied fairly extensively within the confines of secondary education (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005; Kahne; Westheimer & Rogers, 2000; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), but also to a lesser degree in postsecondary institutions (Astin et al., 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hurtado, 2003; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2004). Many aspects of the educational experience – especially those associated with postsecondary attendance –

have yet to be researched to ascertain their relationship with civic engagement. As we will detail more thoroughly service-learning is one form of engaged pedagogy lauded for its ability to stimulate the skills and motivations necessary for student civic engagement (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

It is important to understand what the research currently tells us specifically about the effects of service-learning. In their study of service-learning, Eyler and Giles (1999) note that the college experience can contribute to the development of key aspects of citizenship that are essential in a democratic society. According to them civic engagement is strengthened by the development of social capital, or networks, that can be drawn upon in times of need for social problem-solving. In their study of postsecondary students, they delineate five primary elements of citizenship: Values (what I ought to do), knowledge (I know what I ought to do and why), skills (I know how to do), efficacy (I can do and will do), and commitment (I must and will do). Their study of civic engagement illustrates that service-learning has a positive effect on personal (moral & interpersonal) development and social (sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills) outcomes. Service-learning also has a positive influence on one's commitment to service. A subsequent study by Astin et al. (2000) further supports findings that service-learning has a positive effect on self-rated leadership skills, critical thinking, commitment to activism, choosing a service career and plans to participate in service after college – all of which can be argued to enhance or promote civic engagement.

In addition, Hurtado's work extends our understanding of student civic engagement by exploring engagement in the context of an increasingly diverse democracy. Her study is guided by the framework of a "differentiated citizenship" in a diverse democracy which is based on the assumption that in order to construct a democracy based on equal

representation, differences must be recognized, valued, and represented (Hurtado, 2003). Hurtado et al. measure students' civic skills and engagement through students' perceptions of, interactions with, reactions to, inclusion of, and conflict with diverse groups. They examined three outcomes, (1) ability to see multiple perspectives, (2) belief that conflict enhances democracy and (3) importance of social action engagement. They found that gender and pre-college engagement are key predictors in each of the three outcomes. In addition, interaction with diverse peers during the college years was positively correlated with the three democratic outcomes.

Hurtado et al. (2003) also examined how campus diversity experiences provide students with opportunities to learn democratic skills. Findings from the Hurtado et al. longitudinal study suggest that the quality of diverse peer interactions in college affects students' academic development and civic inclinations. In particular, Hurtado et al. found that students who have frequent contact with diverse peers develop greater cognitive complexity, increased levels of cultural awareness, and are more likely to vote in federal and state elections. However, students who reported negative cross-racial interactions with peers demonstrated marginally lower scores on numerous civic outcomes, including placing importance on civic contributions, self-efficacy for social change, and concern for the public good. With respect to community service, students who attended co-curricular events with a diversity orientation, or participated in community service focused on particular communities in need, placed greater importance on social action than those students who did not participate. Thus, students' participation in various types of community service and diversity-related co-curricular activities may help cultivate a value of social action.

In their longitudinal study of college graduates, Nie and Hillygus (2001) used Baccalaureate and Beyond data from the National Center for Education Statistics to study the engagement of 1992 college graduates one year after their graduation. They found that 72% of the graduates voted in the 1992 election, 23% were currently volunteering, and 39% said that it was important to influence the political structure. They also found that, even in the post-college years, the Verbal SAT score was a positive predictor of political participation, voting, and voluntarism. However, school rankings did not appear to have an independent effect on any measures of political participation. Two of Nie and Hillygus' most compelling findings are that the college-level social science curriculum had a positive effect, as did the students' verbal aptitude, on political engagement and behavior.

As stated earlier, research shows that background characteristics (Hurtado et al., 2003; Sax, 2004; Verba et al., 1995) are key predictors of certain types of civic aptitudes and levels of civic engagement. Verba et al. (1995) determined that, in particular, income and parent education are key predictors of type and level of civic engagement. However, Colby and Erlich (2003) note that while many background characteristics influence later civic engagement, moral and civic character continue to develop throughout the college years. In fact, previous studies have shown that religious involvement (attending services, and/or church membership) during the college years is positively correlated with community service during and even beyond the college years (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005). In addition, other research shows that involvement in religious organizations is an important site for development of civic skills (within the general populace) – and that such experiences play a critical role in facilitating political engagement (Verba et al., 1993). Even after controlling for educational level and other background characteristics, Verba et al. found that not only was religious involvement positively correlated with

higher levels of civic skills, but that Protestants developed more church skills than Catholics. Such findings suggest that religious involvement during college may have a positive relationship with post-college community and political engagement.

The extant literature on civic and political engagement and college experiences provides important perspectives, but ones that focus mainly on students during, rather than after their college years. While we know that education level is the single most powerful predictor of civic engagement and we know a fair amount about the particular college experiences that might contribute to this effect, we know much less about the enduring effects of college experiences. As will be explored in detail in the following section, this study has been designed to begin to fill in this gap in our knowledge and to help us understand what particular college experiences and environments might have a lasting impact on college students' civic and political engagement well into the post-college years.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research question:

- What pre-college as well as curricular and co-curricular college experiences predict a young adult's political and civic engagement in the post-college years?

Method and Data

Data Source and Sample

The data for our study come from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) that is housed at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). This study drew from CIRP survey data collected at three different times. The first survey (Freshman Survey), conducted in 1994,

was administered either during orientation programs or in the first few weeks of classes (prior to students having any substantial experience with college). The students were administered a second survey in 1998 (College Student Survey) at the end of their fourth year, presumably when they were about to graduate. Finally, the students were administered a third survey in 2004 (Post-college Follow-up). The final sample, consisting of those who responded to all three surveys, included 8618 participants representing 229 institutions. Of the participants, 5835 (67.6%) were female, and 2799 (32.4%) were male. Of the 229 institutions, 195 (85.1%) were private institutions, and 34 (14.8%) were public institutions. In an attempt to correct and account for non-response bias in the dataset a weighting procedure was developed and employed. This process accounted for the overrepresentation of women and private institutions in our sample and was weighted up to a population of 1994 first-time full-time (FTFT) freshmen who completed a degree within four years.

Dependent Variables

To examine the relationship between college experiences and civic engagement, we chose two factors that assessed both civic (Working with Communities) and political (Political Activism) engagement (See Table 1). All items in the factors were taken from the Post-college Follow-up Survey that was administered in 2004. Factors were created using principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. All factor loadings were greater than .60 (see Table 1).

Our first factor, Working with Communities, measures civic engagement. It is comprised of six variables and has an alpha reliability of .80. This factor reflects a spectrum of ways in which young adults may be involved in their local community (see

Table 1). Additionally, the factor also incorporates the goals of ‘becoming a community leader’ and ‘participating in a community action program’ during the post-college years.

The second construct, Political Activism, is made up of seven items with an alpha reliability of .83. This factor examines ways in which individuals are politically engaged (see Table 1). Both outcomes enabled us to test previous findings. However, this study extends previous studies by examining the lasting impact of college experiences on civic and political engagement in the post-college years.

Table 1

Factor Loadings and Reliabilities for 2004 Dependent Variables

Factor and Survey Items	Factor Loading	Internal Consistency (Alpha)
<u><i>Working with Communities</i></u>		
		.80
Worked on a community project with government agency/program ^a	.72	
Worked with others to solve a community problem ^a	.77	
Played a leadership role in improving community ^a	.80	
Participated in a community/neighborhood group ^a	.60	
Participate in a community action program ^b	.65	
Becoming a community leader ^b	.70	
	Factor Loading	Internal Consistency (Alpha)
<u><i>Political Activism</i></u>		
		.83
Political organization ^a	.82	
Gave opinion: Contact/Visit public official ^a	.66	
Worked with a political group/official ^a	.81	
Displayed button/sticker/sign ^a	.75	
Door to door canvassing ^a	.67	
Donated money: political candidate/cause ^a	.70	
Participated in protests/demonstrations/rallies ^c	.61	

^a Four-point scale: From 1 = Never to 4 = Frequently.

^b Four-point scale: From 1 = Not important to 4 = Essential.

^c Three-point scale: From 1 = Not at all to 3 = Frequently.

Independent Variables

The key independent variables of interest concern the curricular and co-curricular context for service during college. We focused on five variables: volunteering, service-learning and three reflection variables. The volunteering item asked students if they performed any community/volunteer service since entering college (1=no, 2=yes). Students were also queried as to whether or not they performed their community/volunteer service as part of a class (1=no, 2=yes). Finally, students were asked if they performed any reflection activities in connection with their service. The reflection activities were: 1) kept a journal, 2) discussed experience with other students, and 3) discussed experience with professor (all coded on a 3-point scale: 1=not at all, 2=occasionally, 3=frequently).

Control Variables

Eight key sets of control variables were also included in the analyses. The first set of control variables consisted of student background characteristics: gender, race, socioeconomic status, and SAT scores. The second set of control variables included variables relating to pre-college socialization (e.g., volunteering in high school). The third set of control variables included institutional characteristics such as type, control, selectivity, and peer measures. The next sets of variables controlled for college experiences and environment such as diverse interaction with peers and academic major. The fifth set of control variables was made up of college values and beliefs (e.g., the goal of influencing social values). Finally, the last control block consisted of post-college lifestyle indicators such as marital status, attending graduate school and level of religious involvement.

While these control variables are not of primary substantive interest, they were included in the analyses because they represent characteristics, predispositions, and college and post-college experiences of young adults that, unless taken into account, could have influenced the outcomes and caused an overestimation of the effects of service on post-college outcomes (Astin, 1993).

Analytic Approach

For this study, we utilized a method of causal modeling which used blocked, stepwise linear regression analysis to study the changes in partial regression coefficients for all variables at each step in the analysis (Astin, 1993). The advantage of this form of analysis is that it allows us to observe how each of the independent variables (or block of variables) affects the relationship of the dependent variable to every other variable, both in and out of the model. By framing our study in this way, we gain a stronger understanding of the impact of college environments and experiences on young adults' political engagement, community/civic engagement, and values and goals six years out of college.

Findings

In this section, descriptive data are provided and are followed by a description of the findings from the multivariate analyses. In describing the multivariate analyses, the block of service variables is first presented with particular college experiences next being explored. Finally, the student background and pre-college characteristics that were controlled for are delineated.

Descriptives

Our sample consists of 8618 college graduates who are six years out of college. Additional characteristics are listed in Table 2. More than half of our respondents are female. Additionally, more than half are married or in a partnership, have no children, and are working full-time.

Table 2

*Breakdown of Sample Characteristics**

Sample	Percent
Gender	
Female	57
Male	44
Married/partnership	55
Working toward a graduate degree	37
Have a graduate degree	32
Have no children	79
Working full-time	84

*N=8618

Civic & Political Engagement

Students in our sample began service early in their school lives, with over three fourths (81 percent) of students having participated in some form of community service in high school. In college, 74 percent of students engaged in community service activities and 27 percent of students also participated in a service-learning course. Participation in volunteer work declines slightly in the post-college years (68 percent) (see Table 3).

Table 3

Volunteer Work at Three Time Points	Percent
Performed volunteer work in the past year (1994)	81
Performed volunteer work in the past year (1998)	74

Performed volunteer work in the past year (2004)

68

In addition to high levels of volunteerism, the young adults in our sample are civically and politically engaged in other ways (see Table 4). A majority of the young adults in our sample frequently or occasionally discussed community issues or donated money to a human or community service organization.

Table 4

Post-College Civic Values (very important or essential) and Behaviors (frequently or occasionally)	Percent
Donated money to a human/community service organization	69
Discussed community issues	65
Donated professional services	35
Participated in a community/neighborhood group	25
Become a community leader	15
Worked on community proj w/govt agency/pgm	14
Worked w/others to solve community problem	14
Participate in community action program	14
Played a leadership role in improving the community	13

An overwhelming majority of young adults are politically engaged through boycotting and voting in national elections (see Table 5).

Table 5

Political Engagement Behaviors (frequently or occasionally)	Percent
Discussed politics	91
Voted in a national election	87
Boycotted a product	67
Participated in a political organization	16
Gave opinion: Contact/visit pub official	10
Donated money: Political candidate/cause	10
Participated in protests/demonstrations/rallies	9
Worked w/political group/official	5
Went door to door canvassing	2

Civic Engagement

Our regression analyses revealed that the strongest predictors of post-college civic engagement are volunteering, religious involvement, leadership opportunities, and enrollment in certain types of curricula increased the likelihood of being civically engaged. The relationship of these activities and experiences with the outcome are discussed below.

Civic Engagement: Working with Communities – Service

The findings for our service variables are reported in Table 6. Of the five independent variables of interest, only two entered our regression model: *volunteering* and *reflection* in the form of discussions with a professor. Volunteering had a strong correlation ($r=.21$) with our civic engagement factor, Working with Communities. Notably, volunteering during college has a strong, significant effect on our outcome throughout the model. In other words, the effect of volunteering while in college has a lasting effect on Working with Communities even in the post-college years. The second variable of interest that entered the model was reflection through discussions with a professor. The correlation between the reflection variable and our outcome was $r=.19$. Similar to volunteering, reflection through discussions with a professor has a strong, significant effect on our outcome. Reflection also has a lasting impact on our post-college civic engagement measure.

Service-learning and the two reflection variables did not enter the model. Service-learning is significant until volunteering in 1998 enters and eliminates the effect of service-learning. The reflection variables of *using a journal* or *discussion with other*

students are also significant until reflection in the form of discussions with a professor enter , wiping out their effects.

Table 6

Summary Table for Working with Communities - Service

	R	Student			College		
		Background Characteristics	Service	Exp	Exp	Exp	Exp
Curricular & co-curricular context for service							
Service-learning ^a	.09	.05 ***	.02 *	-.03 *			
Reflection:Discussed exp w students ^a	.19	.11 ***	.06 ***	.01			
Reflection:Discussed exp w professor	.19	.11 ***	.08 ***	.05 ***			
Reflection: Journal ^a	.11	.06 ***	.03 **	-.01			
Volunteering/community service	.21	.13 ***	.13 ***	.07 ***			

^a Variable did not enter regression model

*** p < .001

** p < .01

* p < .05

Civic Engagement: Working with Communities – College Environments

College environments that affect our outcome are reported in Table 7. Both diversity and academic major curricula predict our outcome. Students who majored in political science, history, or social science are more likely to be civically engaged once they graduate from college. Additionally, students who took an ethnic studies course are more likely to work with communities in the post-college years than those students who did not take an ethnic studies course while they were in college. In addition to the above-mentioned curricular contexts, participation in a position (such as student government and leadership training) also has a strong significant impact on Working with Communities in the post-college years. Leadership opportunities are strongly correlated with the outcome and also remain highly significant (p < .001) throughout the model. Lastly, attending religious services has a lasting impact on Working with Communities in the post-college years.

Table 7

Summary Table for Working with Communities - College Environments (excluding service)

College Environments	r	Student Background Characteristics		College Exp	
		Characteristics	Service	Exp	
Major: History or political science	.08	.05 ***	.05 ***	.04 ***	***
Major: Social sciences	.10	.09 ***	.08 ***	.07 ***	***
Enrolled in ethnic studies course	.15	.10 ***	.09 ***	.07 ***	***
Student government	.15	.08 ***	.07 ***	.05 ***	***
Leadership training	.17	.09 ***	.06 ***	.05 ***	***
Attended religious services	.10	.06 ***	.04 ***	.05 ***	***

*** p < .001

** p < .01

* p < .05

Civic Engagement: Working with Communities – Background Characteristics & Pre-college Socialization

Pre-college indicators tell researchers about the characteristics, values and behaviors that students bring with them to college. Such experiences and values can have a profound effect on students’ college experiences. Table 8 lists some of the pre-college predictors of Working with Communities in the post-college years. Of the pre-college socialization variables, the goal of *becoming a community leader* had the highest correlation with the outcome. It is not surprising that those students who hold the goal of becoming a community leader in 1994 have a predisposition to work with communities. *Leadership ability* and the *goal of influencing social values* were also strong predictors of our outcome. In other words, those students who rated themselves highly on leadership ability and also valued influencing social values were more likely to work with communities in the post college years. Additionally, *students who attended college to prepare for graduate school* were more likely to Work with Communities after college.

Table 8

Summary Table for Working with Communities - Student Background Characteristics & Pre-college Socialization

	r	Student Background Characteristics		Service		College Exp	
Student Background Characteristics & Pre-college Socialization							
Be a community leader	.24	.10	***	.09	***	.08	***
Leadership ability	.22	.10	***	.09	***	.09	***
Influence social values	.20	.07	***	.07	***	.05	***
Prepare for graduate school	.10	.05	***	.04	***	.03	**
Be well off financially	-.09	-.12	***	-.10	***	-.08	***

*** p < .001

** p < .01

* p < .05

Political Engagement

Similar to our other factor of Working in Communities, volunteering, leadership opportunities and particular curricula increased the likelihood of being politically engaged. These variables are discussed below.

Political Engagement: Political Activism – Service

Of our five service variables, volunteering is the only variable that entered. It has a simple r of .12 and betas remain highly significant (p < .001) throughout the model. This result indicates that those students who volunteer during college are more likely to be *politically active* after they graduate from college than those students who do not volunteer during college – even after controlling for pre-college behaviors and background characteristics.

Similarly to what was seen with the other factor, service-learning and reflection in the form of discussions with a professor are significant but their effects are eliminated by

volunteering in 1998. The effects of the other reflection variables were erased by pre-college socialization variables.

Table 9

Summary Table for Political Activism – Service

	r	Student Background Characteristics	Service	College Exp
Curricular & Co-curricular Context for Service				
Service-learning ^a	.06	.04 ***	.03 *	.02
Reflection:Discuss exp. with students ^a	.07	.02	-.02	-.03
Reflection:Discuss exp. with professor ^a	.08	.05 ***	.03 *	.02
Reflection: Journal ^a	.04	.02	.01	.00
Volunteering	.12	.07 ***	.07 ***	.05 ***

^a Variable did not enter the regression model

*** p < .001

** p < .01

* p < .05

Political Engagement: Political Activism – College Environments

Table 10 lists the strongest predictors of Political Activism that were college environments. As expected, those students who majored in political science or history were more likely to be politically engaged in the post-college years than those who did not major in history or political science. The value of *keeping up-to-date with politics* is the strongest college environment predictor of our outcome. The *attendance at a racial/cultural awareness workshop, cross-racial interaction* and *participation in student government* were also strong predictors of Political Activism in the post-college years.

Table 10

Summary Table for Political Activism - College Environments (excluding service)

	r	Student Background Characteristics		Servi ce		College Exp	
College Environments							
Major: History or political science	.19	.14 ***		.14 ***		.14 ***	***
Keep up to date with politics	.29	.21 ***		.20 ***		.17 ***	***
Attd. racial/cultural awareness workshop	.15	.08 ***		.07 ***		.06 ***	***
Cross-racial interaction	.09	.06 ***		.06 ***		.06 ***	***
Student government	.14	.07 ***		.07 ***		.06 ***	***

*** p < .001

** p < .01

* p < .05

Political Engagement: Political Activism – Background characteristics & Pre-college socialization

As mentioned earlier, students bring a set of experiences and values with them to college that may affect their college and post-college experiences. As illustrated in Table 11, those students who had the goals of influencing political structure and social values and who also discussed politics have a predisposition towards Political Activism in the post-college years. Additionally, those students who are confident in their *writing ability* are more likely to be politically active in the post-college years than those students who rated themselves lower on writing ability. Finally, *taking part in a community action program* has a strong significant relationship with Political Activism.

Table 11

Summary Table for Political Activism - Student Background Characteristics & Pre-college Socialization

	R	Student Background Characteristics	Service	College Exp
Student Background Characteristics & Pre-college Socialization				
Influence political structure	.20	.09 ***	.09 ***	.06 **
Influence social values	.16	.06 ***	.06 ***	.06 ***
Discussed politics	.26	.17 ***	.17 ***	.15 ***
Take Part in a community action program	.15	.07 ***	.06 ***	.06 ***
Writing ability	.14	.06 ***	.06 ***	.04 ***

*** p < .001
** p < .01
* p < .05

Discussion

Our results indicate that a number of formal postsecondary educational experiences are strong predictors of both civic and political engagement well into the post-college years. As expected, students who majored in political science/history are more likely to be civically and politically engaged in the post-college years. Battistoni & Hudson state that the work of political scientists is to “[enhance] community involvement, political activism, citizen participation, public work, or social capital” (1997, p. 5), all of which are clearly reflected in our outcomes. This finding reinforces the Nie and Hillgus (2001) finding that one-year after college graduation, social science curriculum had a positive effect on political engagement. Our findings enrich our understanding of the relationship by demonstrating that even six years after graduation, curricular choices have an enduring impact.

A number of diversity-related college environments were also significantly associated with the outcomes. Earlier research on diversity courses reveals that these courses help increase students’ sense of social responsibility (Hurtado et al., 2003). Taking an ethnic

studies class has a positive effect on Working with Communities in the post-college years. In addition, engaging in cross-racial interaction and attending cultural awareness workshops has a positive impact on Political Activism. These findings lend more support to earlier findings that ethnic studies courses and cross-racial interaction do in fact encourage skills and aptitudes that researchers such as Hurtado, have identified as critical in a diverse democracy. Again, the findings contribute to the present understanding of the many benefits accrued through curricular and co-curricular diversity efforts– and importantly that these benefits last well beyond graduation.

Because one of our outcomes, Working with Communities, has a leadership orientation, it comes as no surprise that participation in leadership positions during college would be a strong predictor. In Astin and Astin's, *Leadership Reconsidered*, leadership is referred to as a group process, with a goal of creating change. A leader is viewed “as a change agent, i.e., one who fosters change” (2000, p.8). Therefore, it seems logical that individuals who believe they are strong leaders might also have a desire to work in their local community in order to create change. Likewise, young adults who view themselves as strong leaders are understandably more likely to seek to create change through political activism. Additionally, Kuh (1995) found that college “out-of-class activities” such as student government provide the skills necessary “to be competent in the workplace” (p.147). Such experiences develop leadership ability because students “[apply] what they are learning from their studies to other areas of their lives” (Kuh, p.148, 1995).

As stated in the literature review, religious involvement is positively correlated with participation in community service during and after college (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005)

and development of civic skills (Verba et al., 1993). Consistent with previous studies of students through the college years, religious involvement was a strong predictor of civic engagement. The strength of attending religious services during college approximates the predictive strength of our other experiential predictors – and may serve to illustrate Verba et al.’s findings that church attendance can strengthen the civic skills that are necessary for civic engagement, but interestingly the effect is not illustrated in the Political Activism outcome – but only in the Working with Communities outcome. Possibly disaggregating by religious organization would help explain this finding.

Volunteering continues to be a strong and consistent predictor of civic and political engagement. We know from previous research that volunteering and service-learning courses can aid in the development of civic engagement skills and aptitudes. This is attributed to the experiences, similar to diversity courses and programming, which help students develop skills such as one’s sense of social responsibility and commitment to helping people within their community (Astin et al., 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hurtado, 2003). Such moral and interpersonal development is key in the development of engaged citizens.

Conclusion

The two main contributions of this paper are that first, our findings further solidify previous findings of particular college environments that positively impact civic and political engagement and second, our findings demonstrate that a number of previously identified college experiences are not only significant predictors of engagement at the point of college exit, but even six years after graduation. This latter finding is of special

importance in an era of accountability where postsecondary institutions are increasingly expected to invest in college environments that will produce specific outcomes. Given the fact that most institutions have the goal of developing effective citizens who are prepared for a lifetime of civic and political engagement, identifying particular college curricula, co-curricular service, and diversity experiences that support these outcomes is of great value to institutions. It is hoped that colleges and universities will be able to use these findings to inform the provision of additional curricula and programs that can develop civic skills, values, and behaviors that endure well into the post-college years.

Appendix A. Summary of Variables and Indices in the Research Model for Working in Communities

Dependent/ Outcomes Variable

Civic engagement		
<i>Working with Communities</i> ($\alpha = .80$)	workcomm = polact04+	Scale: 6=lowest to 24=highest
Worked on a community project with government agency/program	polact08 + polact05 +	
Worked with others to solve a community problem	howvol12 + obj0410 +	
Played a leadership role in improving community	obj0413	
Participated in a community/neighborhood group		
Participate in a community action program		
Becoming a community leader		

Student Background Characteristics (Block 1)

Gender	sifsex	1=Male, 2=Female
Socioeconomic Status	ses	Scale:
SAT composite	satcomp_reg	Scale
White	siface1	1=no, 2=yes
African Am/Black	siface2	1=no, 2=yes
American Indian	siface3	1=no, 2=yes
Asian American	siface4	1=no, 2=yes
Latina/o	latino	1=no, 2=yes
Other	siface8	1=no, 2=yes

Pre-College Socialization (Block 2)

BE A COMMUNITY LEADER	sifobj19_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
DISCUSSED POLITICS	sifact20_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
Volunteering in 1994	service94	Scale:
CREATIVITY	sifrat05_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
BE VERY WELL OFF FINANCIALLY	sifobj08_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
STUDIED WITH OTHER STUDENTS	sifact06_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
MATHEMATICAL ABILITY	sifrat09_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
LEADERSHIP ABILITY	sifrat08_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
PARTYING	sifhpw05_reg	1=none to 8=over 20
INFLUENCE SOCIAL VALUES	sifobj05_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
CONTROL AIDS BY MAND TSTG	sifvws12_reg	1=disagree strongly to 4=agree strongly
GUEST IN TEACHER'S HOME	sifact07_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
YRS OF HS STUDY: FOR LANG	yrstudy3	1=none to 7=5 or more
PREP FOR GRADUATE SCH	reason11_reg	1=not important to 3=very important
POLITICAL ORIENTATION	sifpolvw	1=far right to 5=far left

STUDENT CLUBS/GROUPS	sifhpw08_reg	1=none to 8=over 20
BE SUCCESSFUL IN OWN BUSINESS	sifobj13_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
HAVE ADMIN RESPONSIBILITY	sifobj07_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
TAKE PART IN COMMUNITY ACTION	sifobj16_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
TOO CONCERNED 4 CRIMINALS	sifvws04_reg	1=disagree strongly to 4=agree strongly
EMOTIONAL HEALTH	sifrat07_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%

Institutional Characteristics (Block 3)

Public University	pubuniv	1=no, 2=yes
Private University	priuniv	1=no, 2=yes
Public 4yr	pub4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Private Nonsectarian 4yr	priNS4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Catholic 4 year	Cath4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Other Religious 4yr	Other4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Selectivity	selectiv	Scale
Peer Mean All: Intellectual Self-Esteem	pm_intel	Scale
Peer Mean All: Social Activism	pm_altru	Scale
Peer Mean All: Materialism and Status	pm_mater	Scale
Socioeconomic Status_1	pm_ses	Scale
Peer Mean All: Discuss Politics	pm_dispol	Scale
Peer Mean All: Hedonism	pm_hedon	Scale
Peer Mean All: Service Orientation in High School	pm_volunt	Scale

Curricular Context for Service (Block 4)

Took a Service-learning course	csvhow1	1=no, 2=yes
Service Orientation 98	service98	Scale

Types of Reflection (Block 5)

Kept a journal	refjourn	1=no, 2=yes
Discussed experience with other students	refstud	1=no, 2=yes
Discussed experience with a professor	refprof	1=no, 2=yes

College Environments (Block 6)

Living on campus	oncampus	1=no, 2=yes
Cross racial interaction	interact	Scale
student academic interaction	studx	Scale
TOOK INTERDISCIPLINARY CRSE	acdact02_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
PROF PROVIDED-ASSIST WITH STUDY SKILLS (mva-reg)	provid08_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
PROF PROVIDED-NEG FEEDBACK	provid12_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
ABOU	colact11_reg	1=no, 2=yes

HAD ROOMMATE OF DIFF RACE/ ETHNICITY (mva-reg)	colact08_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ENR IN ETHNIC STUDIES COURSE	colact09_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ENR IN WOMEN'S STUDIES CRSE	colact12_reg	1=no, 2=yes
RACIAL/ETHNIC STUDENT ORG	colact10_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ATTD RACIAL/CULT AWARENESS WORKSHOP (mva-reg)	colact01_reg	1=no, 2=yes
JOINED A FRAT OR SORORITY	colact23_reg	1=no, 2=yes
IN LEADERSHIP TRAINING	colact22_reg	1=no, 2=yes
IN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM	colact06_reg	1=no, 2=yes
IN STUDENT GOVERNMENT	genact06_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ATTD RELIGIOUS SERVICE	majbio	1=no, 2=yes
css major: biological science	majbus	1=no, 2=yes
css major: business	majeduc	1=no, 2=yes
css major: education	majengi	1=no, 2=yes
css major: engineering	majart	1=no, 2=yes
css major: fine arts	majheal	1=no, 2=yes
css major: health professional	majhis	1=no, 2=yes
css major: history or political science	majhum	1=no, 2=yes
css major: humanities/english	majjour	1=no, 2=yes
css major: journalism/communications	majphys	1=no, 2=yes
css major: physical science/compscience/ math/stats	majpsy	1=no, 2=yes
css major: psychology	majsoc	1=no, 2=yes
css major: social science		

Value and beliefs (Block 7)

Openness to diversity	openness	Scale
UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS (mva-reg)	cssrat14_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
LEADERSHIP ABILITY (mva-reg)	cssrat08_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
HELP OTHERS IN DIFFICULTY (mva-reg)	cssobj09_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
PROMOTE RACIAL UNDERSTANDING (mva-reg)	cssobj17_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
KEEP UP TO DATE WITH POLITICS (mva-reg)	cssobj18_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
INFLUENCE SOCIAL VALUES (mva-reg)	cssobj05_reg	Scale
Faculty Support: Emotional	facsupr	Scale
Faculty Support: Research		

Post-college lifestyle (Block 8)

Marital Status	MARRY04	1=no, 2=yes
Children in 2004	children	1=none to 4=3 or more
Hours per Week Working (for pay)	HRSWORK	1=less than 10 to 7=60+
Currently in Grad School	gradnow	1=no, 2=yes
Already hold a MA, MBA, etc	masters	1=no, 2=yes
Already hold a Ph.D, M.D, J.D. etc	doctorat	1=no, 2=yes
Understanding of Others	RATE0414	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
Leadership Ability	RATE0408	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
Factor 4: Religious Involvement Factor	religious_inv_reg	Scale
		Scale

Factor 6: Recreation & Leisure Factor	rec_leisure_reg	Scale
Factor 7: Involvement with Alma Mater Factor	alma_mater_reg	Scale
Factor 8: News sources: TV Factor	news_tv_reg	Scale
Factor 9: News sources: Print Media Factor	news_print_reg	Scale
Factor 10: News sources: Radio Factor	news_radio_reg	Scale
Factor 11: Charitable Giving Factor	char_giv_reg	Scale
Factor 12: Voting Factor	voting_reg	

1998 pre-tests (Block 9)

BECOME A COMMUNITY LEADER	cssobj19_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
PART IN COMMUNITY ACTION	cssobj16_reg	1=not important to 4=essential

Appendix B. Summary of Variables and Indices in the Research Model in Political Activism

Dependent/ Outcomes Variable

Political Engagement		
<i>Political activism</i> ($\alpha = .83$)	Poleng2 = howvol05+	Scale: 7=lowest to 27=highest
Political Organization	polact14 + polact18	
Gave opinion: Contacted/Visited public official	+polact21 +polact22 +	
Worked with a political group/official	polact09 +acts0411	
Displayed button/sticker/sign		
Door to door canvassing		
Donated money: Political candidate/cause		
Part in protests/demos/rallies		

Student Background Characteristics (Block 1)

Gender	sifsex	1=Male, 2=Female
Socioeconomic Status	ses	Scale:
SAT composite	satcomp_reg	Scale
White	sifrace1	1=no, 2=yes
African Am/Black	sifrace2	1=no, 2=yes
American Indian	sifrace3	1=no, 2=yes
Asian American	sifrace4	1=no, 2=yes
Latina/o	latino	1=no, 2=yes
Other	sifrace8	1=no, 2=yes

Pre-College Socialization (Block 2)

DISCUSSED POLITICS	sifact20_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
INFLUENCE SOCIAL VALUES	sifobj05_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
VISITED ART GALLERY/MUSEUM	sifact21_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
HAVE ADMIN RESPONSIBILITY	sifobj07_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
BE A COMMUNITY LEADER	sifobj19_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
POLITICAL ORIENTATION	sifpolvw_reg	1=far right to 5=far left
LEADERSHIP ABILITY	sifrat08_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
KEEP UP WITH POLI AFF	sifobj18_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
Volunteering in 1994	service94	Scale
STUDYING/HOMEWORK	sifhpw01_reg	1=none to 8=over 20
WRITING ABILITY	sifrat19_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
YRS OF HS STUDY: PHYS SCI	yrstudy4	1=none to 7=5 or more
PRO RACIAL UNDERSTANDING	sifobj17_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
TALKING WITH TEACHER	sifhpw03_reg	1=none to 8=over 20
Rel Pref: Catholic	catholic	1=no, 2=yes
		1=disagree strongly to 4=agree strongly

CONTROL AIDS BY MAND TESTING	sifvws12_reg	1=disagree strongly to 4=agree strongly
RACIAL DISCR NOT A PROBLEM	sifvws16_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
EMOTIONAL HEALTH	sifrat07_reg	1=no, 2=yes
Rel Pref: Other Religions - Buddhist, Quaker, Mormon, Islamic & Other	other	1=not important to 4=essential
TAKE PART IN COMMUNITY ACTION (mva-reg)	sifobj16_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
RAISE A FAMILY (mva-reg)	sifobj06_reg	

Institutional Characteristics (Block 3)

Public University	pubuniv	1=no, 2=yes
Private University	priuniv	1=no, 2=yes
Public 4yr	pub4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Private Nonsectarian 4yr	priNS4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Catholic 4 year	Cath4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Other Religious 4yr	Other4yr	1=no, 2=yes
Selectivity	selectiv	Scale
Peer Mean All: Intellectual Self-Esteem	pm_intel	Scale
Peer Mean All: Social Activism	pm_altru	Scale
Peer Mean All: Materialism and Status	pm_mater	Scale
Socioeconomic Status_1	pm_ses	Scale
Peer Mean All: Discuss Politics	pm_dispol	Scale
Peer Mean All: Hedonism	pm_hedon	Scale
Peer Mean All: Service Orientation in High School	pm_volunt	Scale

Curricular Context for Service (Block 4)

Took a Service-learning course	csvhow1	1=no, 2=yes
Service Orientation 98	service98	Scale

Types of Reflection (Block 5)

Kept a journal	refjourn	1=no, 2=yes
Discussed experience with other students	refstud	1=no, 2=yes
Discussed experience with a professor	refprof	1=no, 2=yes

College Environments (Block 6)

Living on campus	oncampus	1=no, 2=yes
Cross racial interaction	interact	Scale
student academic interaction	studx	Scale
TOOK INTERDISCIPLINARY CRSE	acdact02_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently
PROF PROVIDED-ASSIST WITH		1=not at all to 3=frequently
STUDY SKILLS (mva-reg)	provid08_reg	1=not at all to 3=frequently

PROF PROVIDED-NEG FEEDBACK	provid12_reg	1=no, 2=yes
HAD ROOMMATE OF DIFF RACE/ ETHNICITY (mva-reg)	colact11_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ENR IN ETHNIC STUDIES COURSE	colact08_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ENR IN WOMEN'S STUDIES CRSE	colact09_reg	1=no, 2=yes
RACIAL/ETHNIC STUDENT ORG ATTD RACIAL/CULT AWARENESS WORKSHOP (mva-reg)	colact12_reg	1=no, 2=yes
JOINED A FRAT OR SORORITY	colact10_reg	1=no, 2=yes
IN LEADERSHIP TRAINING	colact01_reg	1=no, 2=yes
IN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM	colact23_reg	1=no, 2=yes
IN STUDENT GOVERNMENT	colact22_reg	1=no, 2=yes
ATTD RELIGIOUS SERVICE	colact06_reg	1=no, 2=yes
css major: biological science	genact06_reg	1=no, 2=yes
css major: business	majbio	1=no, 2=yes
css major: education	majbus	1=no, 2=yes
css major: engineering	majeduc	1=no, 2=yes
css major: fine arts	majengi	1=no, 2=yes
css major: health professional	majart	1=no, 2=yes
css major: history or political science	majheal	1=no, 2=yes
css major: humanities/english	majhis	1=no, 2=yes
css major: journalism/communications	majhum	1=no, 2=yes
css major: physical science/compscience/ math/stats	majjour	1=no, 2=yes
css major: psychology	majphys	1=far right to 5=far left
css major: social science	majpsy	
POLITICAL ORIENTATION	majsoc	
	csspolvw_reg	

Value and beliefs (Block 7)

Openness to diversity	openness	Scale
UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS (mva-reg)	cssrat14_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
LEADERSHIP ABILITY (mva-reg)	cssrat08_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
HELP OTHERS IN DIFFICULTY(mva-reg)	cssobj09_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY ACTION (mva-reg)	cssobj16_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
PROMOTE RACIAL UNDERSTANDING (mva-reg)	cssobj17_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
KEEP UP TO DATE WITH POLITICS (mva-reg)	cssobj18_reg	1=not important to 4=essential
INFLUENCE SOCIAL VALUES (mva-reg)	cssobj05_reg	Scale
BECOME A COMMUNITY LEADER (mva-reg)	cssobj19_reg	Scale
Faculty Support: Emotional	facsup	
Faculty Support: Research	facsupr	

Post-college lifestyle (Block 8)

Marital Status	MARRY04	1=no, 2=yes
Children in 2004	children	1=none to 4=3 or more
Hours per Week Working (for pay)	HRSWORK	1=less than 10 to 7=60+
Currently in Grad School	gradnow	1=no, 2=yes
Already hold a MA, MBA, etc	masters	1=no, 2=yes
Already hold a Ph.D, M.D, J.D. etc	doctorat	1=no, 2=yes
Understanding of Others	RATE0414_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
Leadership Ability	RATE0408_reg	1=lowest 10% to 5=top 10%
Political Orientation	POLIVW04_reg	1=far right to 5=far left
Factor 4: Religious Involvement Factor	religious_inv_reg	Scale
Factor 6: Recreation & Leisure Factor	rec_leisure_reg	Scale
Factor 7: Involvement with Alma Mater Factor	alma_mater_reg	Scale
Factor 8: News sources: TV Factor	news_tv_reg	Scale
Factor 9: News sources: Print Media Factor	news_print_reg	Scale
Factor 10: News sources: Radio Factor	news_radio_reg	Scale
Factor 11: Charitable Giving Factor	char_giv_reg	Scale
Factor 12: Voting Factor	voting_reg	Scale

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