

**Preaching to the Apathetic and Uninterested:  
Teaching Citizenship to Freshmen and Non-Majors**

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Over the past two years, we have been tackling the same problem: how to teach an introductory political science course targeted at freshmen and non-majors that explores and invigorates democratic citizenship. Teaching citizenship is important, normatively speaking, because active, engaged, and diverse civic engagement is critical to democratic politics. The goals of our courses, therefore, are 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; to examine examples of citizen engagement that may challenge preconceptions about the forms and forums of democratic participation; and to demonstrate to undergraduates how political science takes citizenship seriously.

This paper seeks to spawn broader discussion about how a course on citizenship can address the complexities of democracy and diversity by drawing from our classroom experiences. We begin by situating this pedagogical project within the widespread and prescient concern within the discipline to address trends of civic disengagement. We then discuss the target audience for this course, and how the course fits into the core curriculum at Seattle University. While we see the purpose of this course as part of these broader concerns, 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 have used,

activities we have designed, and assessment techniques we utilize. By examining feedback from students who have taken our courses, we offer insight into both successful and unsuccessful pedagogical practices. We conclude by offering recommendations based on our successful and unsuccessful experiences, and call for longer term analyses of how similar courses and initiatives might be adopted as part the discipline's effort to foster civic education.

## **I. Civic Engagement & Political Science**

It is not a secret that declining levels of civic engagement are a central concern of political scientists. Perhaps most prominently, concerns about declining levels of political participation and political interest popularized by Putnam's *Bowling Alone* have spawned a rich literature on social capital.<sup>1</sup> In addition, articles in *PS: Political Science and Politics* have periodically profiled the political (dis)interest, (in)aptitude, attitudes, and (in)activism of incoming college freshmen.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as the recent publication of *Democracy at Risk* illustrates, interest in increasing political participation remains a point of emphasis for the American Political Science Association.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, political scientists have also been concerned about the challenge of educating students for lives as democratic citizens. This concern has focused primarily on two levels: first, on the content and curriculum of social studies in high schools,<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Sheilah Mann, "What the Survey of American College Freshmen Tells Us About the Interest in Politics and Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 32, no. 2 (1999): 263-268, and Stephen Earl Bennett and Linda L.M. Bennett, "What Political Scientists Should Know about the Survey of First-Year Students in 2000," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34, no. 2 (2001): 295-299.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Macedo, et al., *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "Educating the 'Good' Citizen: Political Choices and Pedagogical Goals," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004): 241-247, and E. Wayne Ross, "Negotiating the Politics of Citizenship Education," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004):

second, on the role of service learning.<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, there has been relatively little written about how political science faculty can play a part in educating undergraduate political science majors for democratic citizenship, let alone non-majors.<sup>6</sup> Yet, we believe that those who chronicle and study levels of participation, who argue that without such increases our very democracy is at risk, have an obligation to think critically about how to extend civic education to undergraduates who have no interests in politics.

Furthermore, we accept the premise so widely shared in the field that “Citizens enter into public affairs in many ways and for many reasons.”<sup>7</sup> We recognize that an undergraduate education in citizenship must necessarily do more than discuss voting or running for office. It must challenge students who might otherwise have no political interests, may not follow the news, and may prefer a life of private leisure and the pursuit of individual happiness, to think about the multiple ways that they might already, or may one day be able to, participate as political actors. In teaching citizenship we are specifically seeking to instill values of democratic citizenship in college freshmen and non-majors. We adopt a type of citizenship education that emphasizes, as Ross asserts, that “the pursuit of democracy (the purposes of citizenship education) becomes the process of creating communities with shared interests;” an educational philosophy based on the idea that “democracy is not merely exercising the right to vote, but rather an

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249-251, and William A. Galston, “Civic Education and Political Participation,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004): 263-266.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Susan Hunter and Richard A. Brisbin, Jr., “The Impact of Service Learning on Democratic and Civic Values,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33, no. 3 (2000): 623-626; David E. Campbell, “Social Capital and Service Learning,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33, no. 3 (2000): 641-645; and Richard Battistoni and William E. Hudson, eds. *Experiencing Citizenship: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Political Science* (Washington D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> For an exception, see, Robert Bradley, “Citizens and Governance: An Alternative Approach to American Government,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30, no. 3 (1997): 553-557.

<sup>7</sup> Macedo et al., 6.

obligation to engage in careful consideration and discussion for the purpose of creating a better life.”<sup>8</sup> Our efforts have not always been successful, but we have been conscious of our failures and in the remainder of this paper hope to be part of a broader dialogue about the role and ability of political science faculty to increase levels of civic awareness by teaching citizenship to college freshman and non-majors.

## **II. Purpose of Citizenship Course**

At Seattle University, Citizenship is an introductory course taught to freshmen and non-majors as part of a series of liberal studies courses called the core curriculum. As of fall 2006 our student body at SU numbers 7,226, which is comprised of 4,160 undergraduate students.<sup>9</sup> The core curriculum introduces all students to the Jesuit educational tradition and has three goals: (1) “To develop the whole person for a life of service”; (2) “To provide a foundation for questioning and learning in any major profession throughout one’s entire life”; and (3) “To give a common intellectual experience to all Seattle University students.”<sup>10</sup> The distinctive characteristics of the core curriculum include its provision of: an integrated freshmen year for all students; order and sequence to student learning; experience in the methods and content of the range of liberal arts, sciences, philosophy, and theology; classes for active learning; and a global perspective, an intercultural and gender awareness, and a sense of social and personal responsibility.<sup>11</sup>

Students experience the core curriculum in three phases. The first phase, called the “Foundations of Wisdom” is designed to “give a student the basis to move from

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<sup>8</sup> Ross, 250-251.

<sup>9</sup> Seattle University, “Fall Enrollment Overview,” [http://www.seattleu.edu/ir/FallProfile/06FQ\\_EnrollmentOverview.pdf](http://www.seattleu.edu/ir/FallProfile/06FQ_EnrollmentOverview.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Seattle University, “Core Curriculum Overview,” <http://www.seattleu.edu/newregistration/freshman/>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

experience to understanding and then to critical judgment and responsible choices.”<sup>12</sup>

The second phase, called “Person in Society”, provides the Citizenship course as one of its options. This phase helps students “expand horizons by confronting major modern issues”<sup>13</sup> and builds upon the foundational skills learned in phase one. Here the student explores issues raised by economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Most of the students who take the Citizenship course are freshmen, however, there are a number of sophomores, juniors and an occasional senior as well. The majority of the students in our classes are part of the “millennial generation” and, in many ways, fit the description of this generation with their pervasive use of technology and extensive parental involvement.<sup>14</sup>

For the final phase of the core students must satisfy phase three requirements called “Responsibility and Service.” This phase helps “the student prepare more directly for a life of service in the light of authentic human and Christian values.”<sup>15</sup>

### **III. Rethinking Intro to Political Science**

Every political science department offers an introductory course for the major and some, such as ours, 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 as many of the students are required to take the class to graduate and, as one student stated, “Because I came into this course not really interested in it, it was difficult.” Each of us has taught this course four times over the past two years and has utilized different texts and teaching

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<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Penny Rue, “The Millennial Generation goes to Law School”, (presentation at the Northeast Association of Pre Law Advisors, Washington, D.C, June 7, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

materials for the course. Thus, the following reflections of our successes and challenges teaching this course to freshmen and non-majors as part of the university's required curriculum seeks to stimulate further discussion of effective methods of teaching this course.

A. *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 on the Turkish labor movement. As an undergraduate I was involved with political campaigns in Connecticut, as well as an effort 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 in forming a union for graduate student employees at the University of Washington. This activism both 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 to me that his son, who is about my age, wants nothing to do with unions or politics in general. Indeed, disengagement and disillusionment with politics is not only 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 that was titled Citizenship.

I saw this as 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, I also saw this as an ideal place to draw together the different strands of political science—focusing on both normative and empirical aspects of citizenship. My central thesis in this course is 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, then, we should act. In a democracy, I argue, the answers to these questions are debated and forged out of the active political participation of citizens. Consequently, I 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 these questions get promoted. This course, therefore, examines the essence of politics and the importance of political participation. We examine these topics by considering what it means to participate in politics, why so many people are cynical about political participation, and how political participation entails more than voting or running for office.

I have now taught this course four times, and while I have made changes to the syllabus each time, I always divide the course into three sections, which combine to focus on questions of engagement, social justice, and what politics means. The course begins with political philosophy and philosophical considerations of democracy, citizenship, and participation. I present 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 is that students 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 and Benjamin Barber 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 both too abstract and too complex. More recently, I have used a combination of Dewey's democratic theory and Iris Marion Young's call for communicative democracy in order to defend the merits of democratic citizenship.

The second part of the course moves to an empirical analysis of citizen (in)activism in Vancouver, B.C. and in the contemporary United States. Here, I use Michael Brown's 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 in which the collective consideration of who we are and what kind of world we want to live in can take place. During this section I also explore the state of civic engagement in contemporary American politics. To accomplish this task I have 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 conclude the course by demonstrating how

political science can take citizenship more seriously. I have done this both by examining Doug McAdam's 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 have experimented with a number of non-traditional texts. At the conclusion of the first section of the course, I have sought more provocative (yet perhaps obtuse) takes on the meaning of political life. In past iterations of the course I have shown 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 boldly (even if bizarrely). This year, we read Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in class and then saw it performed in Seattle. 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 have 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 claims about declining levels of social capital. Finally, I try to use short documentary film segments to augment specific readings. For instance, I have used segments from a documentary on the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston—a case we read about in class, as well as clips of direct action posted on-line by ACT-UP, New York.

Students generally respond more positively to the texts on American politics than they do to the 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 believe 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 utilize service learning as a required component to the course. For each section of the course I work with Seattle University's center for service learning in order to identify a list of local organizations that are in need of volunteers. I specifically seek out general organizations and not necessarily 'political' organizations in order to challenge students to think expansively about what political participation might entail. This choice allows students to identify similarities with and differences between their service learning sites and the allegedly 'non-political' organizations focused on in course texts. Due to the constraints of the quarter system, students are only asked to volunteer for 18-20 hours throughout the 10 weeks of the course. On some levels, therefore, this type of service learning is not ideally designed to foster political engagement. Thus, 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.”<sup>16</sup> Aware of these limitations, I have tried to use them as a teaching device. In paper assignments, for example, I encourage my students to explore ways in which their service learning fails to fulfill these criteria, and to discuss whether or not these experiences have done anything to enhance their political efficacy.

I specifically seek to relate the service learning to other course texts. For instance, I ask them to examine the extent to which their organizations empower those who use their services, rather than treat them simply as clients. I also ask 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 addition, 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—and I ask my students to find out how their service learning organizations are funded.

In my experience, student responses to service learning are mixed. Some students are excited by what they are asked to do and as a result tend to participate more willingly when classroom discussions incorporate the service learning experiences. 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

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<sup>16</sup> Macedo et al., 126.

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 define it on my syllabus is 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 have geared my assessment of student learning with this goal in mind. Primarily, I assess my students through three thought paper assignments. These assignments are 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.

Because many of the students enrolled in these classes do so only because they fulfill part of their core requirements, we have sought to develop activities that can better

engage students in the subject of civic engagement. Here, I wish to mention two activities I have used during different iterations of the course, but largely with success. The first (and less ambitious) is an activity I conduct when reading Putnam's chapter on informal social capital building. I ask my students to keep a journal of their meals for the week of the reading. I ask them to write down where they eat, who they eat with, how long the meal lasts and what they discuss. My goal with this assignment is to get the students to rethink about the ways in which their everyday activities may be more or less part of community building. Although I recognize that social capital is a highly contested concept, this activity consistently gets students to adopt this concept—often (so they tell me) in conversations with their friends.

The second activity involves a group project that I incorporated into my course during the autumn of 2006. I divided up the class into three groups, each of which was 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.<sup>17</sup> Each group was to research their topic, which often involved interviews and off-campus visits, and develop an argument 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 I've taught in this class, some give hope that this

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<sup>17</sup> 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 as examples of restoring the American community. Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), chapters 2, 4, and 12. 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 participant in the protests. Janet Thomas, *The Battle in Seattle: The Story Behind and Beyond the WTO Demonstrations* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2000).

project has 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.” And another student states, “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.” Yet, despite the different tactics outline above, debate and discussion are never as forthcoming as I would like. Indeed, in their course evaluations the most common critiques voiced by students are about the lack of debate. Consequently, despite the positive responses from some students, the lack of enthusiasm leaves me wondering: is there more that I can do to inspire political interest in freshman and non-majors, or is this simply an uphill battle destined to have moderate successes?

*B. Teaching Reflections of Angelique Davis*

I chose to teach Citizenship due to my own activism and 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 the stories of segregation and their experiences as African Americans during Jim Crow and the civil rights movement spurred my interest in becoming an attorney. Even today I am moved by the realization that the stories I heard in my own family about lynching, stolen property, job discrimination and other injustices were not in our distant past. These accounts spurred

my interest in activism as a student through numerous campus organizations and my decision to pursue a career as a lawyer. 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 due to the influence I was able to have on my 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 with the same story - 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 I teach this course to largely apathetic and uninterested freshmen and non-majors, multiple teaching styles and media are utilized. During the first third of my course students learn the fundamentals of citizen participation and why it is important. This segment must be included because, unfortunately, my experience is that most of my students have not learned this information in their high school civics course (if they even had such a course). We utilize Janda's *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.<sup>18</sup> The initial section aims to give the students a foundation for the remainder of the course.

I extensively use technology to teach Janda's text. Most class sessions include a PowerPoint lecture and a group activity. Often the group activity includes some type of student survey – so the class could measure themselves against the general population. Almost daily I show media clips relevant to the topic of the day. I play these short clips online to students with an overhead projector. The internet sources I utilize to find these clips included the websites of major television networks, National Public Radio, and also local media stations. These clips educate students on how to view the news, stimulate class discussion and help students apply the text to the world around them.

After learning the fundamentals of citizen participation in Janda's text my students read Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. In the past I have had students read the entire book, but found this largely ineffective over time as most students do 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 included that this was a political science course (emphasizing science) and that this type of research must be conducted to support Putnam's conclusions. The response to this is, of course, 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 reaction, however, former students frequently indicate that they remember the main concepts set forth in *Bowling Alone* and recognize the importance and impact of social capital on their daily lives.

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<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Janda, et al., *The Challenge of Democracy: Government in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 6th Edition 2006).

To teach *Bowling Alone* I utilize brief lectures, group activities, and case studies. An effective group activity is the mock ‘party’ in which students learn about the value of informal social connections through interviewing each other about whether or not they are a “macher” or a “schmooser”.<sup>19</sup> My use of films for case studies also proved effective. It continues to amaze me each time I have announced to a class that we are doing a case study of the popular film *Office Space* to study connections in the workplace that my students clap and cheer. For this class segment I provide the class with a series of questions to answer while analyzing the film. After the film, the class engages in a guided discussion of the film based upon their answers to the questions. I also utilize this method with the film *Crash* to teach about the decline of social capital.

My course also covers political participation through litigation. My classes have read *Class Action: The Story of Lois Jenson and the Landmark Case That Changed Sexual Harassment Law*<sup>20</sup>, which is 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 three of my classes Jean Boler, the lead attorney who worked on this case and a former colleague of mine, spoke to my class about her experiences.<sup>21</sup> I also use other texts about participation through the judicial system in the

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<sup>19</sup> Putnam, 93-115.

<sup>20</sup> Clara Bingham and Laura Leedy Gansler, *Class Action: The Story of Lois Jenson and the Landmark Case That Changed Sexual Harassment Law* (New York: Doubleday 2002). This book was recently made into the popular film *North Country* (Warner Bros. 2005) starring Charlize Theron, Sissy Spacek and Woody Harrelson.

<sup>21</sup> For the film reenactment of the *Jensen v. Eveleth Mines* case Warner Brothers chose to portray, Jean Boler (who is female) in the movie *North Country* by Woody Harrelson (who is male).

context of the Japanese internment case *Korematsu v. United States*<sup>22</sup> and also the case of *Miranda v. Arizona*.

Multimedia presentations are a must for these students who walk into class talking to their friends on cell phones, listening to their iPods, text 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 utilizing technology to teach them is essential to keeping them engaged. Thus, I utilize PowerPoint presentations, media clips, music, online oral arguments, film and interactive internet presentations during class.

My Citizenship Classes also requires at least 18 hours of service learning. Our campus has a Center for Service and Community Engagement which helps facilitate the students' service learning experience. Each student picks an organization, with my approval, for their service learning experience. I allow each student to pick their own organization so they will, hopefully, be more invested in the experience. Initially, many students appear to resent having to fit service learning into their already busy schedules. By mid-quarter, however, students appear generally to gain a sense of personal satisfaction from the experience and an understanding of how their service learning experience contributes to the success of our democracy. One student indicated that "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

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<sup>22</sup> 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.

also interesting to note that some students continue volunteering with their service learning site after the course ends. I integrate 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 have what I call ‘Citizenship Day’. On Citizenship Day students must bring 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 summarizes their article, updates the class on their service learning, and explains how both relate to the course. I have found that once students warm up this is the most popular, and memorable, segment of the class. Inevitably the articles turn into a class discussion in which students actively engage in learning about current events and in political dialogue. Most of my students indicate 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, as demonstrated by the two students quoted above, is a way to keep students actively engaged in the learning process and to, hopefully, develop their interest in staying abreast of current events so they can be informed citizens.

#### **IV. Conclusion & Recommendations**

While trends of civic disengagement have become a central part of empirical and theoretical studies in political science, and while there has been a steady effort to identify ways to address these trends, we believe political scientists have paid insufficient attention to the ways in which courses targeted at college freshmen and non-majors can play a role in this process. Throughout this paper we have utilized our experiences teaching citizenship courses at a small-liberal arts college to reflect on teaching strategies that we have implemented with varying degrees of success. By using student feedback and evaluations we have 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 course can be a potentially helpful tool for addressing the negative trends in civic engagement. Yet, it is 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:

1. First, we believe other college campuses and departments ought to begin to rethink introduction to political science along the lines of these themes. We would like to see more courses and more faculty devoted to teaching about the importance of citizenship to freshmen and non-majors. We believe this can be an opportunity to stretch the way members of the discipline present complex empirical and theoretical work to a broader population.
2. 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 studies of their impact. Perhaps this is an area where APSA can

assist in building the networks and in providing the funding such an analysis would require.

3. Third, to stimulate the proliferation of introductory political science courses that emphasize the importance of civic engagement we believe that there is a need for the development of curriculum to facilitate the teaching of these courses. Currently there are a number of books and articles that can be patched together to form a class; however, there is no comprehensive text or teaching aids for this type of course.

Our hope is that these recommendations will stimulate further discourse regarding the value of citizenship courses in the political science curriculum and, ultimately, increase our students' level of civic engagement.

## Appendix A

In assessing the effectiveness of our teaching strategies, we distributed the following email to students formerly enrolled in our citizenship courses. Feedback was strictly voluntary, and the anonymity of students was protected.

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 in Casey Hall (4<sup>th</sup> floor west).

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,