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Using the Classroom to Cultivate Student Support for Participation in Campus Life

Educators and policy makers have become increasingly concerned over young citizens' political apathy (Carnegie Corporation of New York & CIRCLE, 2003; Galston, 2003). Political participation has declined across the board since the 1960s as voting rates fell from almost 65% to around 50% in 2000. Yet voting rates for young people, ages 18 and 24, have dropped the most, hitting a low of 36% in 2000 before rebounding to 42% in the hotly contested 2004 presidential election (CIRCLE, 2005; Levine & Lopez, 2002).

Such apathy affects not only those for whom a high school diploma marks the end of formal education, but also characterizes those bound for college. Panel studies of college freshmen conducted since the 1960s reveal that an array of political indicators including thinking that keeping up with politics is important, discussing politics with friends, and acquiring political knowledge, have all declined by about half across the past four decades (Sax, Astin, Lindholm, Saenz, Korn, & Mahoney, 2003). Researchers note similar patterns in young citizens' political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001). Such findings have led the American Political Science Task Force on Civic Education (1998) to conclude that "current levels of political knowledge, political engagement, and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in the United States" (pp. 636-37).

College and Citizenship

Many advocate intervention through formal civic education (Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, 2003; Galston, 2003). Spurred on by the

recommendations of the Wingspread Commission on the Future of Higher Education and works by Boyer (1987), Ehrlich (2000) and Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont and Stephens (2003), many colleges have rededicated themselves to one of the oldest goals of a liberal arts education – grooming students for civic and political leadership (Dewey, 1916). In doing so, however, faculty and administrators must work to overcome habits of neglect.

After five years discussing civic education on U.S. campuses, for example, the president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities concluded “that there is not just a neglect of, but a resistance to college-level study of United States democratic principles” (Schneider, 2000, pp. 98, 120). Colby et al. (2003, p. 19) confirm that even institutions with a strong commitment to civics typically fail to promote the goal of influencing public policies, while more than half of college seniors responding to a recent National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reported that their college experiences had little or no effects on their plans to vote (Kuh & Umbach, 2004). Higher education institutions have historically dealt with the tensions between character promotion and other student development goals (Strange, 2004). Given multiple agendas, faculty and administrators have paid little explicit attention to civic education and assumed that the core curriculum prepares students for public life.

Some, however, attribute professors’ lack of interest in civics to an increased concern for workplace training (Bok, 2006, p. 176). Sax (2004) argues that as academic disciplines specialized, the goal of citizenship development was eclipsed by efforts to teach narrow, professional skills. This trend is problematic because it helps to foster an “aggressively individualistic understanding of society,” which undermines responsibility for community well-being (Sax, 2004, p. 26). Regardless of whether higher education’s

inattention to civic education can be attributed to long-term neglect or to more recent trends, college graduates' behavior makes it clear that current efforts are inadequate. As Bok (2006) states, "at a time when the quality of American public life is jeopardized by ignorance and apathy, it is an act of self-interest, as well as a civic duty, for educators to do whatever they can to address the problem" (p. 193).

What Should Educators Do?

Those who wish to follow Bok's (2006) advice can work to promote citizenship in a number of ways. As knowledge of democratic practices and government institutions is linked to participation, requiring all students to take an American government course could be effective (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001). Encouraging students to enroll in social science electives should also help, as exposure to such coursework has a similar effect (Nie & Hillygus, 2001). Many colleges have added community service to their requirements, and research shows that these experiences are beneficial, as long as students do not see them as a replacement for political activities (Yates & Youniss, 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

Yet, one of the most important college experiences is participation in student affairs and extra-curricular activities. The benefits of an active campus life are undeniable (Kuh, 1995). Students who participate gain enhanced leadership skills (Schuh & Lavery, 1983), as well as the ability to maintain mature, intimate relationships (Hood, 1984) and to secure higher post-college income (Pace, 1979). Wilson (1966) argues that a full 70% of what students learn during college results from extra-curricular activity, while Pace (1979) claims that it is the only college experience predictive of adult success, no matter

how “success” is defined. Much of what students learn in campus life is related to political participation, as Pascarella, Ethington, and Smart (1988) link campus involvement to the development of altruistic values associated with good citizenship, while Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, p. 424) demonstrate that such participation is a better predictor of future engagement than taking political science courses.

Compensating for Diminished Associational Life

Moreover, participation in campus life may be especially important for current college students as historical circumstances and firsthand accounts of their experiences suggest it addresses their specific needs. When asked to explain their lack of interest in politics, young people claim to believe their involvement will not make any difference (National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1988). Findings from focus groups conducted for the Kettering Foundation reveal that young people are pessimistic about their ability to promote solutions to public problems (Matthews, 2000). Even when young focus group participants imagined attempting to address a political issue, their responses revolved around individual political acts, leading Matthews (2000) to conclude that, “the perception that they [young people] were lone individuals up against an impregnable megalith, surely contributed to their sense of powerlessness” (p. 152).

This perception corresponds to the historical circumstances framing younger citizens’ political socialization. Many conclude America’s youngest cohorts grew up during a time of declining associational life (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999), whereas those who question this claim acknowledge that American associational life has been “churning” (Ladd, 1999). Much of young people’s political disinterest, political disengagement and low political efficacy may be attributed to the

fact that they came of age during this transformation in American associational life and have not learned how to participate effectively within groups, either for the purposes of identifying a common agenda or for pursuing collectively. The college experience most likely to replace these missing experiences is participation in campus life.

Difficulties Promoting Participation in Campus Life

Unfortunately, students do not arrive on campus ready to embrace campus life. Today's undergraduates often think of college as a "stepping-stone to well-paid careers but not as a vital means for achieving better government or stronger communities" (Bok, 2006, p. 184). Panel studies of incoming freshmen reveal that the number of students who claim "being very well off financially" as an important goal for their college education has risen from 45% to 74% since the 1960s (Astin, 1998). The trend among students has been to see the primary purpose of a college education to be economic security (Colby et al., 2003, p. 40). Students who view the purpose of higher education from a perspective of such extreme utilitarian-individualism cannot be expected to seek out activities that do not clearly serve this narrow agenda. Not surprisingly, given this orientation, the percentage of students voting in student government elections was more than cut in half across a similar time frame, falling to an abysmal range of 11% to 15% by 1997 (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 54).

Motivating students to pursue activities outside the classroom is essential to prevent their initial orientations from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fortunately, students come to college expecting to find mentors (Ruben, 2005), and one can hope that they will find advisors who will guide them to seek out beneficial activities and will participate along with them. The institutional representatives most apt to serve in this

capacity are faculty members. Whereas mentoring undergraduates is a traditional component of faculty members' professional responsibilities, changes in higher education have diminished their abilities and motivations for doing so. Faculty are under increasing demands to engage in scholarship (Austin & Gamson, 1983; Bowen & Schuster, 1986), but the more time faculty expend on research, the less time they have to interact with students.

Kuh et al. (1991, pp. 176-177), for example, argue that retiring professors, who are more apt to be student-centered, are often replaced by younger faculty members who have been socialized to prioritize research. This trend, in combination with colleges' reliance on part-time faculty and decreasing faculty-to-student ratios, means that "avenues to maintaining a sense of campus community and connecting faculty with students out of the class-room are increasingly limited" (Kuh et al., 1991, p. 177). Even when professors contemplate the best ways to deliver a college education, they typically focus on general education requirements and leave concerns over the quality of campus life to administrators (Bok, 2006, p. 53). Yet there are too few administrators to serve as mentors who have reiterative, interpersonal contact with students.

Supportive Student Subcultures

An alternative source of mentors that must not be overlooked is incoming students' upper-class peers. Students spend more time with fellow classmates than they do with professors, and research notes the connection between college peer groups and the development of students' attitudes, values and behaviors (Bean, 1985; Chickering, 1974; Kuh & Umbach, 2004; Pascarella, 1984, 1985). Interviews with undergraduates attending "involving colleges," which are known for the quality of their out-of-class

activities, reveal the extent of this influence. Interviewees described relationships with other pupils as the “high points of their undergraduate experience,” and recognized that “their peers influence them in ways that faculty members or classes never could” (Kuh et al., 1991, p. 192). Higher education institutions achieving the status of an “involving college” typically have student subcultures that promote beneficial out-of-class activities supportive of the college’s educational mission (Kuh et al., 1991, p. 193). Upper-class students combine the characteristics of expertise and similarity, making them a highly credible, and thus highly influential, source of information for incoming freshmen (Simons, Berkowitz & Moyer, 1970; Wilson & Sherrell 1993). Yet peers can also be incompatible with, but equally influential on, students’ learning and personal development (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 1974; Pascarella, 1985). The importance of supportive campus subcultures must not be underestimated.

Initiating an Involving Student Subculture

Hence, this research tests the impact of an intervention intended to promote peer enhancement of campus life by cultivating a core of upper class students committed to the benefits of campus life. Students enrolled in a communication course were exposed to an intervention designed according to the recommendations of persuasion scholars. Persuasion literature indicates that some circumstances encourage people to resist persuasive messages. For example, when people are exposed to information that they disagree with, they engage in selective perception, ignoring or discrediting messages that would require them to adjust deeply held beliefs (Cotton, 1985). In addition, people build up resistance, or self-inoculate, when they are forewarned of a persuasive attempt (Pfau,

1997). Thus the intervention was constructed to discourage reliance on selective perception and inoculation strategies.

Persuasion research also identifies circumstances that encourage audiences to respond to persuasive messages. For example, long-term behavioral changes will not be produced without the use of active information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b). Active cognitive processing results in a great deal of elaboration as people scrutinize information, expect logically-presented arguments, generate counter arguments, seek out more information, and ask probing questions. Those who use active processing tend to resist counter-arguments, remain persuaded for months afterward and easily recall the attitudes that they developed. Moreover, these attitudes predict future behavior (Petty, Haugtvedt & Smith, 1995; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b).

Students' vocational orientation to college suggests they will not be interested in thinking about campus activities unrelated to this agenda. Yet motivation is a prerequisite for active processing, which requires cognitive work and will not be undertaken unless a topic is perceived to be important. Fortunately, research outlines the types of conditions that enhance such motivation. First, people are more inclined to carefully process information when they feel a sense of ego involvement, or personal responsibility, for a particular issue (Petty, Harkins & Williams, 1980). Second, they are inclined to do so when they have a high degree of self-relevance, believing that decisions based on the information will affect their lives (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, 1990; Petty, Cacioppo & Haugtvedt, 1992). Therefore, the intervention was also designed to enhance students' ego involvement and self-relevance regarding extracurricular activities. Both enhance

willingness to actively process information, which is linked to the development of deeply held attitudes predictive of future behavior.

Method

An experimental design, relying on pre- and post-semester questionnaires, was conducted using the naturally-occurring setting of the university classroom. Students in a communication course, *Persuasion in Public Relations* (PiPR), were exposed to an intervention intended to change their attitudes toward participation in campus life and the purpose of a college education. Students could not be randomly assigned to the treatment, but they did not represent a self-selected group with a strong interest in campus life or civic engagement. Most reported taking the class because its public relations component provided vocational training. In addition, four focus groups conducted by trained moderators at the semester's end, indicate that students initially disliked the group project serving as the centerpiece of the intervention – both because they dislike group projects in general and because they prefer to select their own topics for such assignments.

To assess whether changes in students' attitudes could be attributed to the intervention, students in similar courses were used as a control group. These included: a public relations writing course where students learned comparable technical skills, an argumentation and debate course where students discussed controversial topics, a social movement course where students explored collective action, and an introduction to political science course where students learned about American government.

The Participants

A total of 27 students in the treatment course completed both the pre- and post-tests. Almost all of these students, 96%, were communication majors. Only one student

was majoring in political science. All of the students had achieved upper-class status as 15% were juniors and 85% seniors. The mean age was 21, and 77% were female.

Students in the course were 77% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 7% Asian, and 8% other.

Meanwhile, 43 students in the various control groups completed both the pre- and post-test instrument. As none of the students in the control courses displayed significant differences, they were collapsed into a single control group. Most, at 58%, were communication majors, while 30% were majoring in political science. Similar to the treatment group, all subjects in the control group had upper-class status as 43% were juniors and 57% were seniors. The mean age was 21, but only 52% were female. Finally, these students were 81% Caucasian, 9% African American, 2% Asian, and 8% other.

The Intervention

To transform PiPR into an intervention, students were required to design a public relations campaign to increase participation in campus life. To prevent students from engaging in selective perception, no effort was made to explain the connection between such activities and political participation. Most college students are disdainful of explicit political activity, which they often associate with extreme partisanship, bitter debates and wealthy special interests (Dionne, 1991; Fiorina, Abrams & Pope, 2005). As current college students are especially distrustful of politicians (Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, 2003; Galston, 2003; Gibson, 2001), linking the class project to the health of the political system may have suppressed their interest in the topic.¹

In addition, students were prevented from engaging in inoculation by omitting any references to the intended persuasive influence of the project.² Students were informed

that they would all work on the same project to provide a topic familiar to most college students and to allow for division of labor in the production of public relations materials.

In the fall, students were assigned to small groups, each with a different target audience including: fellow students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Each group was instructed to identify the changes that their audience members needed to make in order to promote an ideal campus life. This assignment was intended to evoke students' ego involvement. For the duration of the semester, they were required to assume responsibility for their fellow students' participation in campus activities. Prior to designing their campaign, however, students were asked to develop an ideal vision for campus life at their university. Hence, their first assignment of the semester was to read excerpts from *Involving Colleges* (Kuh et al., 1991) that summarize benefits accruing to students who participate in campus life. While self-relevance can be especially difficult to establish in young audiences (Weinstein, 1980), the types of benefits Kuh et al. (1991) describe, such as successful interpersonal relationships and better job opportunities, should be particularly important to college students. This assignment was intended to increase their self-relevance toward the topic.

Given some students' tendencies to avoid course reading, one small group of students gave a presentation summarizing this information and making preliminary recommendations. Students, rather than the professor, presented this information to enhance the similarity, and hence the credibility, of the source to the target audience (Simmons, Berkowitz & Moyer, 1970). Using information from this presentation, pupils also participated in in-class focus groups moderated by another set of classmates. Student focus group moderators then synthesized the recommendations of the entire class,

developing a collective recommendation for an ideal campus environment. In presenting this recommendation to the class, they emphasized the collaborative nature of the process, which was intended to increase students' commitment to the project's goals. As attention from administrators is linked to undergraduates' sense of empowerment (Sax, 2004), another small group presented the final campaign and public relations materials to an audience of students, administrators, and faculty at the semester's end.

Hence, the intervention was designed to avoid alienating students by not addressing politics and to prevent inoculating students by not warning them of persuasive intentions. It was also intended to promote students' ego involvement and self-relevance, thus motivating them to engage in active processing essential for long-term behavioral changes. Students' were motivated to engage in active processing through self-interested appeals. Ego involvement was tied to earning a high grade on the project, while self-relevance was linked to successful relationships and careers. Yet the core readings on campus life emphasized the full array of benefits tied to participation in campus life, including achieving personal development goals associated with expressive individualism and societal goals associated with communitarianism (Kuh et al., 1991). Thus the intervention promoted active processing not only to enhance students' participation in campus life, but with the hope of changing their underpinning reasons for doing so.

Active processing served one final purpose in the intervention. The core readings included detailed accounts of student engagement at the best "involving colleges" in the United States (Kuh et al., 1991). Students were instructed to use this work to identify activities they might like to promote, with the anticipation that careful reading would provide a vicarious experience of a rich campus life. While direct experiences constitute

the most vivid learning opportunities, people are also capable of gaining knowledge vicariously. According to Bandura (1997), imaginative learning provides an alternative to personal accomplishment as a way to enhance self-efficacy. *Involving Colleges* was assigned with the hope that vicarious learning via the readings would produce outcomes similar to the benefits that accrue to those directly involved in campus life.

This study, therefore, is based on the following predictions: H1: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater increases in anticipated participation in campus life than students in the control group; H2: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater decreases in utilitarian-individualist orientations toward college than students in the control group; H3: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater increases in expressive-individualist orientations toward college than students in the control group; H4: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater increases in communitarian orientations toward college than students in the control group; H5: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater increases in anticipated participation in community life than students in the control group; H6: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater increases in anticipated participation in political activity than students in the control group; and H7: Students exposed to the intervention will have greater increases in their sense of political efficacy than students in the control group.

Results

Findings uncover support for many of these predictions, as students' likelihood of participating in campus life increased while their orientation toward the purpose of a college education broadened. Although students failed to connect these changes to

explicit political action, they did anticipate increased community participation, and their self-efficacy regarding several tasks related to wielding political influence increased.

Anticipated Participation in Campus Life

Anticipated participation in campus life was measured with a series of five-point Likert scale questions asking students to indicate how likely they will be to participate in specific activities in the future. Responses ranged from a high of very likely to a low of not at all likely. Paired sample *t* test analyses support the first hypothesis (Strachan & Altarriba, under review), indicating students in the treatment group reported significant increases in their likelihood of both joining (post *M* = 3.91, *SD* = 1.05; pre *M* = 2.87, *SD* = 1.45) $t(23) = 3.65, p < .001$, and serving as the leader of a student organization (post *M* = 3.58, *SD* = 1.10; pre *M* = 2.79, *SD* = 1.53) $t(23) = 3.19, p < .01$. While not significant, students also reported increases in their likelihood of attending a group meeting (post *M* = 3.88, *SD* = 1.23; pre *M* = 3.32, *SD* = 1.40) $t(24) = 1.83, p < .10$, and of meeting with faculty outside of the classroom (post *M* = 3.91, *SD* = 1.05; pre *M* = 3.45, *SD* = 1.50) $t(23) = 1.74, p < .10$. Students in the control group reported no significant increases, and even some small decreases, in their likelihood of participating in future campus activities.

Focus group discussions provide further support for the first hypothesis (Strachan & Altarriba, under review). Two students, one of whom encouraged a friend to accompany her, joined campus organizations during the semester, while another launched a new club. Across all four focus groups, students agreed that they were now much more apt to participate outside of the classroom. Yet this agreement was marred by dismay that many were graduating. While students were upset at their own lost chances, they were also emphatic that incoming students should be encouraged to participate. One claimed,

“this [the semester project] needs to be done earlier...to get people more involved”; another indicated that he would encourage students with “time left” to “do something”; and a third proposed a mentoring program comparable to the Big-Brother/Big-Sister program.

Responses to the pre- and post-tests, as well as focus group participation, indicate that the intervention altered students’ attitudes toward campus life, making them more apt to encourage their classmates to engage in extra-curricular activities. Given nationwide trends in students’ orientations toward college, this support may have been motivated by participants’ concerns for their and their peers’ economic advancement.

Orientations to the Purpose of College Education

Orientations to the purpose of a college education were measured with a series of five-point Likert scale questions asking students to indicate the importance of a college education in preparing students for success in a wide array of endeavors.³ Responses ranged from a high of extremely important to a low of not at all important. All of the items related to utilitarian individualism, or personal success in the economic realm, were important to students. The number of students who claimed that learning job skills was extremely or very important never dropped below 90% in the pre- or post-test, while at least 50% thought all of the remaining items in this category were extremely or very important at both points in time. Paired sample *t* test analyses provide limited support for the second hypothesis, as students were just as likely to rank all but one of these endeavors as important both before and after the intervention. Yet as Table 1 illustrates, students exposed to the treatment were less likely to rank financial security as important by the semester’s end. Students in the control group experienced no similar change.

Several items related to expressive individualism, or individual personal development, were also important to students at the start of the semester. They always thought that college should help them to develop a better self-understanding and to cultivate their personal values and ethics, as 81% and 70% respectively, claimed these goals were extremely or very important in the fall. Perhaps absorbing justifications of the core curriculum, students also ranked obtaining a broad general education highly. Yet PiPR students developed an enhanced appreciation for other aspects of personal development. Paired sample *t* test analyses, reported in Table 1, provide support for the third hypothesis, indicating students in the treatment group thought deepening their sense of spirituality and developing a personal philosophy of life were more important by the semester's end. In addition, their education's role in advancing self-understanding became even more important. Those in the control group experienced no similar changes.

Students were least likely to consider communitarian, or altruistic agendas benefiting a broader community, to be important in the fall. The only communitarian item collectively ranked as very important in the pre-test was promoting racial understanding. By December, pupils came to think that college's role in helping them to influence social values and to help others were nearly as important as their two most highly valued endeavors – which were, respectively, developing a greater understanding of themselves and learning marketable job skills. As Table 1 illustrates, paired sample *t* test analyses support the fourth hypothesis. PiPR students thought that influencing social values, helping others, promoting the welfare of the community and cleaning up the environment, were more important by the semester's end. Control group students experienced no similar changes.

Focus group dialogue bolsters the conclusion that students still valued economic security, as participants described scrambling to fill resume gaps and to gain experiences attractive to employers. Yet the semester project also served as a consciousness-raising experience. One young woman expressed this new-found self awareness with the indictment, “We’re real selfish.” Another explained that the project had “reinforced the fact that college is important for more than just an education.” Thus the semester project helped students to cultivate a more inclusive orientation toward college that encompassed a burgeoning sense of altruism often associated with political engagement.

Anticipated Participation in Community Affairs and Political Activities

Anticipated participation in community affairs and political activities were measured with a series of five-point Likert scale questions asking students to indicate how likely they will be to participate in specific activities in the future. Responses ranged from a high of very likely to a low of not at all likely.

Paired sample *t* test analyses support the fifth hypothesis (Strachan & Altarriba, under review), as students reported significant increases in their likelihood of both joining (post $M = 2.91$, $SD = .97$; pre $M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.11$) $t(23) = 3.24$, $p < .001$, and serving as the leader of a civic organization (post $M = 2.66$, $SD = .86$; pre $M = 2.04$, $SD = .99$) $t(23) = 3.49$, $p < .01$. They also reported a significant increase in their likelihood of attending the meeting of a civic organization (post $M = 2.96$, $SD = .97$; pre $M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.15$) $t(24) = 2.68$, $p < .01$. Control course students reported no similar increases.

Paired sample *t*-test analyses provide less support for the sixth hypothesis. While students reported average increases ranging from .42 to .08 in their likelihood of participating in a wide array of political activities, none of these increases were

significant. Students in the treatment group did reported a borderline significant increase in their likelihood of leading a political organization (post $M = 1.95$, $SD = .1.04$; pre $M = 1.62$, $SD = .87$) $t(23) = 1.78$, $p < .10$.

At least in community affairs, students came to recognize the importance of their participation. Participants in one focus group agreed that project highlighted their responsibilities to participate because college had made them “more well-rounded” and “open minded.” In another focus group, one student claimed, “I feel like we’re obligated [to participate] now.” She continued, “I can’t...make excuses for why I don’t...watch the news to find out what’s going on around me.” Yet claiming that they are obligated to participate in and learn about civic affairs does not necessarily mean that students feel capable of doing so.

Political and Self Efficacy

Political efficacy was measured with Likert scale questions derived from the National Election Studies (NES).⁴ Paired sample t test analyses reveal no significant improvements in students’ sense of internal political efficacy. They were just as likely to agree with claims such as: “People like me are generally well qualified to participate in the political activity and decision making in our country”; “I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people”; and “It would be difficult for someone like me to make a real difference in politics or government” at both points in time. Similarly, no improvements in external political efficacy occurred, as their agreement with the claims that “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think” and “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does,” did not change.

Yet these NES questions may not provide a fair assessment of shifts in students' self-efficacy. Careful effort was made to avoid linking the intervention to improved political participation so that apolitical college students would not be alienated. As limited support for hypothesis 6 suggests, students had not connected their increased desire to participate in organizations in order to influence social values and to promote the welfare of the community with traditional politics. Hence, their responses to NES internal political efficacy items make sense. In addition, students had not wielded their new skills in a political setting, which explains their consistent answers to NES measures of external political efficacy. Yet these responses do not mean that students failed to gain confidence in their ability to undertake tasks required for any future political endeavors.

Bandura (1997) questions NES efficacy measures for this reason. He recommends avoiding global measures of efficacy in favor of those that address the ability to perform specific activities (p.38). Hence, he criticizes the items used by most political scientists, concluding that "the findings of studies relying on them must be interpreted with considerable caution" (p. 484). Given this criticism, efforts were made to measure increases in students' self-efficacy regarding specific tasks that could readily translate into public affairs. Self-efficacy was measured by asking students to indicate how capable they felt of accomplishing a variety of different tasks, and these measures provided support for the seventh hypothesis. As Table 2 illustrates, paired sample *t* test analyses indicate students felt more confident undertaking activities related to wielding influence on campus, in the community and in politics. PiPR students felt more capable of influencing the quality of campus life, the types of campus activities available, and university officials by the end of the semester. Their perceived capacity to become

members of a student organization also increased significantly, while the increase in their perceived ability to serve as leaders in such organizations was nearly significant.

Paired sample *t* test analyses, reported in Table 2, also indicate that students gained confidence in their abilities to launch and lead community organizations, whereas an increase in their perceived ability to serve as members of such organizations achieved borderline significance. Similarly, students' perceived ability to influence decisions made by local politicians improved significantly, while increases in their perceived ability to develop solutions for shared problems and to influence national politicians were nearly significant. Control group students reported no comparable improvements. PiPR students' self-efficacy increased the most for tasks mastered during the semester, but they also used their imaginations to project wielding influence in civic and political affairs.

Discussion

Students exposed to the intervention anticipated increased participation in both on-campus and community organizations. Based on the long-term effects of such activities (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), this finding alone would prevent students' orientation to college as a financial stepping stone from becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet actively processing information about the purpose of their education also encouraged students to broaden their collegiate agendas.

While students' assessment of college's role in helping them to achieve financial security did decrease across the course of the semester, all of the items related to economic well-being, especially learning marketable job skills, were quite important to students in both the pre- and post-tests. Like their counterparts across the country, PiPR students' college goals reflect their commitment to the values of utilitarian-individualism.

This commitment might be related to the fact that students have had fewer opportunities to participate in the types of voluntary associations that cultivate altruistic values. In addition, it may be related to changing circumstances, as today's college students are not only more likely to be first generation students with lower socio-economic status, they also face an economy characterized by increasing income inequality (Bok, 2006, p. 18; Levy & Murnane, 1992). Today's students are less financially secure than those in the 1960s and 1970s, and this difference may account for their priorities.

PiPR students did become less one-dimensional in their orientations toward their education. Shifts in their priorities reflect new and deeper commitments to expressive individualism and communitarianism. The goal of understanding oneself surpassed even learning job skills in perceived importance, with the goals of helping others, promoting racial understanding and influencing social values not far behind. Yet contrary to expectations, students' anticipated political participation did not improve.

Like others in their generation, PiPR students were reluctant to equate their goals with a political agenda. Perhaps this reluctance stems from changes in the electoral system enabling ideologues to dominate national political debates. Hence, young people, along with many moderate Americans, associate politics with bitter conflicts rather than a means to address their issue concerns (Dionne, 1991; Fiorina, Abrams & Pope, 2005). In the past, Americans were capable of denigrating partisanship while still upholding active citizenship (Skocpol, 2003, pp. 117-18). Young people have not experienced a similar realization that they can be politically active without embracing partisan agendas.

Students may need guidance turning their organizational endeavors toward political goals. Yet this realization may simply come with time. Colby et al. (2003) note

that no single activity transforms students, although experiences providing “the understanding, motivation and skill” essential for “engaged citizenship” can have a cumulative effect such that “the full outcome may not be evident until many years later” (p. 21). If PiPR students decide to pursue political influence in the future, their enhanced self-efficacy in undertaking relevant tasks should make them feel more confident doing so. Further research incorporating longitudinal panel studies would help to determine whether such optimism regarding the long-term effects of classes such as PiPR is warranted.

Conclusion

If faculty members assume more responsibility for the quality of campus life, lessons that begin in the classroom can help to promote participation in “the other curriculum” most apt to influence students’ civic and political engagement (Kuh, 1995; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). This research provides one approach to cultivating a core of engaged students. In addition to seeking out additional ways to foster such peer groups, more can be done to help guide upper-class students as they reach out to freshmen, and to structure student activities to ensure beneficial experiences.

Such efforts will have the most impact if they reflect cross-disciplinary collaboration. As this work demonstrates, higher education researchers provide rich insights into the effects of college experiences, whereas persuasion scholars provide advice regarding effective message design. Political scientists, meanwhile, are most capable of helping students connect on-campus lessons to political undertakings.

Political science studies of associational life also point to the types of structures and activities that have provided “pathways to democratic citizenship” in America’s past

(Skocpol, 2003, p. 98). Reinforcing higher education research documenting the benefits of diversity (Astin, 1993; Hurtado, Engber, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; Johnson & Lollar, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), for example, the most beneficial voluntary associations attract diverse members and channel their efforts into shared endeavors. Such attributes foster the development of altruism and build social trust across demographic groups by cultivating bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). Another desirable organizational trait is a federated structure allowing members from local and state chapters to join forces in pursuit of a common goal, “even when members do not know each other personally” (Skocpol, 2003, p. 97). Furthermore, when associations rely on constitutions to outline their governing rules and provide rudimentary instruction in Robert’s Rules of Order, they also enhance members’ self-efficacy for tasks important to political leadership, as constitutional guidelines and parliamentary procedures are still used to direct collective debate and decision-making in America’s legislative bodies (Skocpol, 2003, p. 100). Political scientists should consider promoting student organizations with similar characteristics. In this undertaking, they should turn to the expertise of organizational communication scholars, many of whom are also deeply concerned with organizational traits that produce democratic outcomes (Cheney, Mumby, Stohl, & Harrison, 1998; Stohl & Cheney, 2001).

Rhetoricians represent another set of potential collaborators. America’s past voluntary associations helped to promote civic engagement not simply by reducing the costs of political participation. They also cultivated members’ cultural identities as good citizens, which were reified during recurring rituals such as induction ceremonies for new officers.⁵ Speeches accompanying these events serve an especially important didactic

function (Hart, 1984). They typically take the form of epideictic rhetoric that explicitly and eloquently upholds shared, but often unspoken, cultural norms. Speeches given to association members can provide similar exhortations, not only spelling out the duties of new officers, but encouraging officers to set aside selfish urges and stressing members' shared obligations as American citizens (Skocpol, 2003, pp. 104, 110). The impact of such appeals deserves further exploration, and rhetoricians are particularly qualified to help students revitalize this tradition within campus organizations.

Yet given our familiarity with research documenting the extent of youth political apathy, political scientists are especially obligated to address the needs of current college students. Restricting our audience to students majoring in political science merely constitutes preaching to the choir – unless the choir members are encouraged to become missionaries who promote campus participation to their peers. Of all academics, political scientists may also have the clearest opportunity to intertwine research agendas with teaching and service activities that promote engagement. To increase the number of undergraduates exposed to such interventions, however, political scientists should draw on the examples described above to become catalysts for collaborative research projects that span across both our academic disciplines and our campuses.

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Notes

¹The author's personal experience teaching courses to communication majors has underscored most students' negative, visceral reactions to the term "politics." Indeed the surest way to cut class size is to include it in a course title. Enrollments in her PiPR course, for example, nearly double that of her course entitled Political Campaign Communication.

²Students were debriefed regarding the purposeful design of the project at the end of the semester. In fact, the debriefing provided a teachable moment, as students had spent the semester learning how to apply the same theories and research findings to their own persuasive intervention.

³These questions were derived, with slight modifications, from The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted by the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University, Bloomington and from the College Student Survey (CSS)

conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. These survey instruments can be accessed, respectively, at:

http://nsse.iub.edu/html/survey_instruments_2005.cfm and

http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/css_survey.html

⁴Questions used in the American National Election Studies can be accessed at:

<http://www.umich.edu/~nes/resources/questions/questions.htm>

⁵Colby et al. (2003, p. 119) recognize that higher education institutions can and should play a similar role in cultivating the cultural identities, and thus long-term behavior, of their graduates.

Table 1

Students' Perceived Purpose of a College Education

	Group	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Change	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>	N
<i>Utilitarian Individualism</i>							
Financial Security	T	4.51 (.84)	4.18 (.87)	-.33	-2.20	.036*	27
	C	4.17 (.93)	4.26 (.86)	.09	.726	.472	42
Authority in My Field	T	4.29 (.95)	4.03 (1.05)	-.26	-1.00	.327	27
	C	4.26 (.59)	4.07 (.84)	-.19	-1.48	.146	42
Learn Job Skills	T	4.74 (.52)	4.59 (.63)	-.15	-1.44	.161	27
	C	4.51 (.67)	4.49 (.63)	-.02	-0.22	.838	43
Wield Administrative Authority	T	3.80 (.74)	3.73 (.77)	-.07	-.464	.646	27
	C	3.51 (.93)	3.66 (.91)	.15	.771	.445	41

Recognition of Colleagues	T	4.22 (.97)	4.22 (.69)	.00	.00	1.00	27
	C	4.05 (.77)	3.81 (.82)	-.26	1.53	-1.53	43
Own a Business	T	3.59 (1.30)	3.66 (1.14)	.07	.386	.703	27
	C	3.51 (1.12)	3.40 (1.05)	-.11	-.658	.514	43
<i>Expressive Individualism</i>							
Deepened Spirituality	T	2.40 (1.30)	2.96 (1.19)	.56	2.57	.016**	27
	C	2.60 (1.33)	2.28 (1.28)	-.32	-1.46	.151	43
Understand Oneself	T	4.18 (.83)	4.70 (.54)	.52	2.76	.010**	27
	C	4.19 (1.05)	4.23 (.78)	.04	.240	.812	43
Personal Philosophy	T	3.44 (1.05)	3.88 (1.01)	.44	2.12	.043*	27
	C	3.21 (1.17)	3.51 (1.16)	.30	1.40	.171	43
Personal Values	T	4.00 (1.14)	4.37 (.68)	.37	1.67	.106	27
	C	3.79 (1.21)	4.19 (.96)	.40	1.77	.084	43
Obtain a Broad Education	T	4.62 (.83)	4.37 (.68)	-.25	-1.65	.110	27
	C	4.35 (.78)	4.12 (.93)	-.23	-1.70	.096	43
<i>Communitarian</i>							
Welfare of Community	T	3.51 (1.15)	3.96 (.89)	.45	2.37	.025*	27
	C	3.60 (.88)	3.65 (.97)	.05	0.27	.789	43
Helping Others	T	3.85 (1.06)	4.29 (.72)	.44	2.59	.016**	27
	C	3.90 (.81)	3.81 (1.01)	-.09	-0.42	.675	43
Influence Social Values	T	3.70 (1.13)	4.11 (.80)	.41	2.27	.031*	27

	C	3.60 (.84)	3.83 (.84)	.23	1.30	.200	43
Environmental Clean-Up	T	2.74 (1.05)	3.07 (.87)	.33	2.20	.036*	27
	C	2.53 (.96)	2.72 (1.00)	.19	1.27	.210	43
Racial Understanding	T	4.00 (.96)	4.29 (.77)	.29	1.68	.103	27
	C	3.67 (1.21)	3.81 (1.03)	.14	0.77	.445	43

T = Treatment; C = Control.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Question: Indicate how important it is for a college education to prepare students like yourself for success in the following endeavors.

Table 2

Students' Self-efficacy Regarding Specific Tasks

	Group	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Change	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	N
<i>Campus Influence Tasks</i>							
Infl. Quality of Campus Life	T	2.62 (.90)	3.65 (.94)	1.03	5.78	.000***	26
	C	2.84 (1.07)	3.09 (1.06)	.25	1.72	.094^	43
Infl. University Officials	T	2.77 (1.03)	3.65 (.94)	.88	4.21	.000***	26
	C	3.07 (1.08)	3.16 (1.17)	.09	0.55	.585	43
Infl. Type of Activities	T	2.77 (.91)	3.54 (.99)	.77	4.32	.000***	26
	C	2.91 (.95)	3.05 (.90)	.59	0.89	.383	43
Member of Student Club	T	3.58 (1.17)	4.15 (.78)	.57	3.11	.005**	26

	C	3.53 (1.26)	3.60 (1.14)	.07	0.43	.667	43
Lead Student Club	T	3.42 (1.21)	3.81 (1.10)	.39	1.79	.086 [^]	26
	C	3.54 (1.26)	3.35 (1.27)	-.19	-1.14	.263	43
<i>Community Influence Tasks</i>							
Launch Comm. Organization	T	3.00 (1.23)	3.61 (1.13)	.61	2.54	.018 ^{**}	26
	C	3.10 (.98)	2.86 (.93)	-.24	-1.30	.200	42
Lead Comm. Organization	T	2.85 (1.12)	3.27 (1.04)	.42	2.10	.046 [*]	26
	C	3.17 (1.29)	3.21 (1.24)	.04	0.27	.785	42
Member of Comm. Org	T	3.19 (1.27)	3.58 (.90)	.39	1.77	.086 [^]	26
	C	3.26 (1.27)	3.24 (1.36)	-.02	-0.15	.878	43
<i>Political Influence Tasks</i>							
Solutions for Broad Problems	T	3.77 (.91)	4.08 (.63)	.50	1.78	.088 [^]	26
	C	3.64 (1.03)	3.67 (1.00)	.03	0.14	.886	42
Influence Local Politicians	T	2.92 (1.02)	3.38 (.90)	.46	2.38	.025 [*]	26
	C	3.17 (1.08)	3.21 (1.03)	.04	0.30	.767	42
Influence Natl. Politicians	T	2.54 (1.24)	3.00 (1.26)	.46	1.95	.063 [^]	26
	C	2.81 (1.11)	2.76 (1.01)	-.05	-0.29	.781	42

T = Treatment; C = Control.

[^]p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Question: Indicate how capable you feel of accomplishing the following tasks.