Civic Literacy across the Curriculum

SETH POLLACK, professor and director of the Service Learning Institute at California State University, Monterey Bay

Founded in 1995, California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) has become nationally recognized for its commitment to developing students’ capacity to lead socially and civicly engaged lives. At CSUMB, civic literacy is as important an educational goal as the more traditional forms of literacy. Building on its commitment to diversity and social justice, CSUMB defines civic literacy as the “knowledge, skills and for thirty to fifty hours during the semester, collectively contributing over sixty thousand hours of service annually to community partners in the region.

Outcomes-Based Faculty Development
The most important aspect of CSUMB’s service-learning program is the depth of integration of issues of justice and social responsibility in the service-

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attitudes that students need to work effectively in a diverse society to create more just and equitable workplaces, communities and social institutions” (CSUMB 2005). Achieving this goal has been the focus of CSUMB’s innovative service-learning program.

All CSUMB undergraduates complete at least two service-learning requirements: a lower-division course called Introduction to Service in Multicultural Communities, and at least one upper-division service-learning course in their major. The lower-division course gives students a foundation in issues of service, social group identity, justice, and social responsibility, while the upper-division course exposes them to issues and questions related to social justice and social responsibility that are pertinent to their future careers or fields of study. In each course, students work in the community learning curriculum across campus. Each department has developed the civic literacy dimension of its academic program with support from the Service Learning Institute, which is organized as an academic department and is thus recognized as a legitimate member of the academic community. The Service Learning Institute has led a series of curriculum development efforts focused on building faculty members’ capacity for teaching about service, justice, and social responsibility through their disciplinary lenses. Essential to this process is the identification of a key social justice question that guides faculty’s curriculum development work.

Using an outcomes-based framework, these workshops have enabled faculty to ground the overarching Upper Division Service-Learning Outcomes in the context and content of their particular field or discipline (CSUMB 2010; see sidebar). As a result, each discipline at CSUMB has entered the conversation about justice and social responsibility on its own terms, and has come to more fully own these aspects of its academic program.

CSUMB thus encourages faculty and students to shift their focus from “doing service” to learning about service, justice, and social responsibility from a relevant disciplinary context. This shift does not diminish the act of service or the value of community partnerships. In fact, these elements become even more critical as departments begin to engage more deeply with injustice and inequality experienced by communities. As faculty strive to develop courses that embrace these issues, the knowledge held by community members and non-university experts becomes essential. While the hours of service and number of completed projects are important, the establishment of a rich, community-engaged discourse about justice and social responsibility across campus may be the greater accomplishment.

Three Diverse Examples
What does the commitment to educating students for justice and social responsibility look like across programs? The following examples are drawn from each of CSUMB’s three colleges: the College of Professional Studies; the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; and the College of Science, Media Arts, and Technology.

Business 303S: Community Economic Development. Every CSUMB business student takes BUS 303S, devoting fifty hours of service to a community organization focused on local education or economic development. Students explore concepts of cultural identity and examine how power relationships among cultural groups affect local economic development and resource distribution. The overarching question that guides student learning

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is: “How can businesses balance the ‘triple bottom line’ of profit, people, and planet?” In the community, students work with local schools, businesses, social service agencies, and economic development corporations all struggling to be profitable while having a positive community impact. For example, students have helped a local community garden produce worm compost as a source of income. Through the “triple bottom line,” issues of justice and social responsibility have found solid grounding in CSUMB’s business school.

Information Technology 361S: Technology Tutors. All students in the School of Information Technology and Communications Design (ITCD) are required to take this service-learning course. Previously, students worked on projects like designing websites and building networks for community organizations, but the connections between their field and issues of justice or social responsibility were not readily clear. The course changed dramatically when the “digital divide” became its organizing theme. Students began to wrestle with the guiding question, “How has digital technology accentuated or alleviated historical inequalities in our community, and what is my responsibility for addressing the digital divide as a future IT professional?” As a result, students are examining the social implications of technological advances and using technology to reduce inequality and marginalization. Among other efforts, ITCD students have helped create and staff a computer training center accessible to the most marginalized members of the community, including the homeless.

Visual and Public Art 320S: Museum Studies. The Visual and Public Art department has long-standing relationships with numerous museums and historic buildings in the region. CSUMB museum studies students learn important curatorial skills while working with these museums to collect, preserve, and display historical objects. These students have increasingly examined the museums’ role in a diverse society guided by the key question: “How does a society or a cultural institution decide what is worth collecting, preserving, and displaying?” Faculty and students have collaborated with local institutions (including the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas and the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History) to develop new exhibits focusing on the region’s diverse cultural history. In this way, CSUMB’s Visual and Public Art program is addressing issues of justice and social responsibility, while the region’s cultural institutions are creating stronger links to the community’s diverse past and laying the groundwork for a more inclusive future.

Centering Civic Literacy
Building a vibrant democracy requires each new generation of citizens to embrace their responsibilities to the national, and now global, commons. In the global twenty-first century, higher education must play a central role in equipping citizens for this ever more complex civic mission. For this to happen, academic departments must more fully embrace civic literacy outcomes as central components of courses and degree programs.

CSUMB has chosen to make civic literacy a serious, legitimate, and vigorous academic endeavor. The result has been an ever-deepening web of relationships between university faculty, staff, and students, and our diverse regional communities. We have not only completed many meaningful community-based projects, but have also sparked rich discussions in our classrooms and departments about our respective roles in building more just and equitable communities. CSUMB’s journey toward twenty-first-century civic literacy has been powerfully transformative, not only for students and communities, but for faculty and their departments—perhaps the most critical transformation of all.

REFERENCES

CSUMB Upper Division Service-Learning Outcomes

Self and Social Awareness: Students deepen their understanding and analysis of the social, cultural, and civic aspects of their personal and professional identities.

Service and Social Responsibility: Students deepen their understanding of the social responsibility of professionals in their field or discipline, and analyze how their professional activities and knowledge can contribute to greater long-term societal well-being.

Community and Social Justice: Students evaluate how the actions of professionals and institutions in their field or discipline foster both equity and inequity in communities and society.

Multicultural Community Building/Civic Engagement: Students learn from and work responsively and inclusively with diverse individuals, groups, and organizations to build more just, equitable, and sustainable communities.
Assessing Civic Mindedness

KATHRYN S. STEINBERG, academic assessment specialist, and KRISTIN E. NORRIS, instructional technology specialist—both of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

Preparation for effective citizenship requires students to acquire and apply knowledge, to exercise critical analysis, and to pursue lifelong learning. In developing these skills and abilities, an effective citizen's personal, social, and intellectual goals are intertwined. Yet programs designed to develop students' personal and social capacities are often separate from their core academic experiences (Eyler 2009), which tend to focus primarily on intellectual development. Thus higher education is charged with fostering student learning and transferring that learning across contexts, including to and from the areas of educational practices (such as reflection) that lead to intended learning outcomes.

Civic engagement is part of the institutional mission at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). An urban commuter research campus with over thirty thousand students, IUPUI is dedicated to facilitating students' civic learning through service-learning courses, service-based student scholarships, cocurricular service activities, and community-based research. The culture of service permeates all campus divisions and coheres in the IUPUI Center for Service and Learning (CSL). The CSL is staffed by thirteen full-time employees (including the two authors) and composed of four offices: the Office of Community Work Study, which employs students as tutors and in other community-based activities; the Office of Service Learning, which provides faculty development related to service learning; the Office of Community Service, which promotes cocurricular community service, volunteering, and campus-wide service events; and the Office of Neighborhood Partnerships, which strengthens relationships between IUPUI and nearby neighborhoods.

Across these offices, CSL administers nine types of service-based scholarships and provides approximately forty-five campus-wide service opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. IUPUI also provides opportunities for students to develop civic skills by enrolling in service-learning courses and serving as faculty assistants for community-based courses and research. Through these engagement opportunities, CSL and IUPUI encourage students to examine their beliefs, passions, and knowledge in relation to their various communities. CSL also assesses the civic learning that occurs throughout these initiatives, and uses these measurements to improve programs and build institutional capacity to further civic engagement at IUPUI (Bringle et al. 2011).

University Initiatives

CSL seeks to develop civic mindedness in IUPUI students. A civic-minded graduate is defined as "a person who has completed a course of study (e.g., bachelor's degree), and has the capacity and desire to work with others to achieve the common good" (Bringle and Steinberg 2010, 429). Likewise, civic mindedness refers to "a person's inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community." Thus we are interested in measuring students' orientations toward the community and toward others in the community, as distinct from their orientations toward self, family, or corporate concerns.

The attributes of a Civic-Minded Graduate (CMG) arise at the intersection of three dimensions:

- Student identity
- Educational experiences
- Civic experiences

Through an extensive literature review, a conceptual framework was developed for the Civic-Minded Graduate construct that arises from these intersections. In this framework, a graduate's civic mindedness is composed...
of outcomes related to four domains: knowledge (cognitive outcomes), dispositions (affective outcomes), skills, and behavioral intentions. The framework includes ten student learning outcomes that we have identified as attributes of a civic-minded graduate, all of which can be fostered through curricular and cocurricular educational activities (based on Bringle and Steinberg 2010). The outcomes, which appear in parentheses below, are classified in terms of the four domains and related subdomains:

**Behavioral Intentions** (stated intentions to be civically involved, for example, by choosing a service-based career or participating in community service)

Many types of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that are undoubtedly related to civic mindedness (for example, leadership, teamwork, and general problem-solving skills) are not included in this conceptual framework. We see these outcomes as implied by the list above, or as combinations of the elements identified in the list.

We use two instruments to measure the construct of civic mindedness: a quantitative scale for self-reported data (the CMG Scale) and a qualitative reflection tool (the CMG Narrative Prompt and the associated evaluative Rubric). We use these instruments to assess the civic learning outcomes of students involved in curricular and cocurricular programs. Both instruments can be used in a range of contexts, including as class assignments, in capstone courses, for institutional reporting, in conjunction with student portfolios, or as part of the evaluation process for university-sponsored civic engagement awards.

The CMG Scale measures students' capacity and desire to work democratically with others to improve their communities or to achieve public good. The thirty-item survey includes subscales (ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") corresponding to the conceptual framework above. Each subscale score consists of the average rating for all items in that subscale, and total scores are based on the average rating for all items.

The CMG Narrative Prompt and Rubric draw inspiration from the civic engagement rubric developed by AAC&U's VALUE project (www.aacu.org/value). We originally intended the narrative prompt to be used as an exit exercise for graduating seniors, but we now apply it widely across the curriculum. Students responding to the Narrative Prompt are asked to write a reflective response to the following prompt:

"I have a responsibility and a commitment to use the knowledge and skills I have gained as a college student to collaborate with others, who may be different from me, to help address issues in society.

We developed a rubric for evaluating the narratives that includes five categories: (a) civic identity, (b) understanding how social issues are addressed in society, (c) active participation in society to address social issues, (d) collaboration with others, and (e) benefit of education to address social issues.

Using these instruments, we have found that service-learning pedagogy is particularly efficacious for developing civic-minded graduates, and that carefully designed cocurricular programs and activities can also contribute to civic learning outcomes. Both quality and quantity matter: opportunities for critical reflection with faculty or staff mentors, placements that involve sufficient hours and meaningful tasks, and strong campus–community partnerships

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**Figure 1: Dimensions Contributing to the Development of the Civic-Minded Graduate**

![Figure 1: Dimensions Contributing to the Development of the Civic-Minded Graduate](image_url)
are all important factors in the development of civic-minded graduates.

**Civic Learning Pathway Initiative**

Through the Civic Learning Pathway Initiative, we are developing a model that describes how postsecondary students develop civic mindedness, and how colleges and universities can contribute to the development of civic-minded graduates. In building this model, we draw from a multidisciplinary literature base to conceptualize the process by which postsecondary students develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, and self-identity that epitomize the civic-minded graduate. The work we have done to develop the model has potential applications for refining programs (for example, student service-based scholarships and community-based work study) to ensure that they serve as pathways for students to become civic-minded graduates. It can also be useful for faculty-driven curriculum development projects at the course and departmental levels.

As part of the Civic Learning Pathway Initiative, we use e-portfolios to promote civic learning and to help students articulate and demonstrate civic growth. In addition to facilitating reflection, e-portfolios foster active learning, motivate students, provide a means for feedback, store multiple media, allow cross-referencing of student work, and are context rich (Zubizarreta 2004). E-portfolios also heighten the social elements of learning (Yancey 2001) and incorporate assessment into the learning process (Cambridge 2001). CSL is using the CMG Prompt and Rubric to measure civic learning via e-portfolios in themed learning communities and first-year seminars with service-learning components. We hope to use the CMG tools to encourage students to think about civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behavioral intentions from the moment they enter the institution until they leave as civic-minded graduates.

**Future Directions**

Assessing students’ civic growth throughout their college careers will help us refine our assessment tools and develop additional prompts that can generate more authentic evidence. In addition, calibrating the rubric will improve its feasibility, reliability, and applicability to disciplines or other units on campus.

The next step in this work will be promoting e-portfolios beyond the themed learning communities and first-year seminars. CSL is uniquely positioned to do this because we work with multiple units, departments, and faculty on campus. CSL currently incorporates e-portfolios into all scholarship programs and will eventually use them with students engaged in some curricular activities (service events, alternative break trips) as well. Evidence collected through these e-portfolios can be used to conduct further research on the development of civic mindedness.

We have been referring to civic mindedness as understood in the North American context, with a particular focus on domestic service-learning. However, global citizenship is a unique area of civic development that warrants special consideration (Bringle, Hatcher, and Jones 2010). We are interested in exploring how our work on civic mindedness applies to American students’ civic education in international service-learning contexts.

**Conclusion**

Accrediting associations and higher education institutions continue to demonstrate increased interest in the value of civic learning and in how civic growth may differ across disciplines and majors. The CMG constructs and assessment tools, coupled with e-portfolios, can help institutions document and assess their work in these areas (Steinberg, Hatcher, and Bringle 2011). Researchers and practitioners should consider modifying these tools according to their contexts to strengthen their institutions’ work to produce civic-minded undergraduates. In addition, practitioners, faculty, and researchers should envision the possibilities for Web 2.0 tools to bolster students’ civic development and help them succeed in today’s global society.

Editor’s note: IUPUI is a member of AAC&U’s LEAP Campus Action Network. To learn more about IUPUI’s Civic-Minded Graduate construct and evaluation tools, contact Kathryn Steinberg at ksteinbe@iupui.edu.

**REFERENCES**


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