ABSTRACT

Title of Document: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN A COMMUNICATION COURSE: A CASE STUDY

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This study examines the thoughts about civic engagement of six unique undergraduate communication students as they take an upper-level argumentation and debate course. Although some scholars (Putnam, 2000) lament the drop in civic engagement in the United States, Jacoby (2009) and others argue that the 1990s "saw a dramatic increase in efforts to bring college and university resources to bear on both broad social issues and local problems" and that campus-community engagement has become increasingly important in recent years (p. 13). As communication scholars, one of our missions is, or should be, to enhance the communication skills that students need to be engaged citizens (Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams, 2008).

To understand the role communication courses may play in the enhancement or creation of a sense of civic engagement in students, this case study followed six undergraduates through the course of their upper-level argumentation and debate

course. Through interviews and journals, thick descriptions were written of these students' experiences, and themes were discovered.

Several key themes emerged from the interviews. Students mentioned the importance of listening, though they did not explore the ethics of listening. Whether or not Americans are more or less civically engaged today met with mixed views. Definitions of civic engagement led students to the importance of local community. Interestingly, national or global efforts were not identified, even though President Obama was mentioned as the most prominent proponent of civic engagement.

Attributes of civic engagement extended beyond listening to confidence and to media/technology literacy. Finally, audience, an important component of public speaking, was recognized as a critical skill necessary for civic engagement. Surprisingly, the students in this study were unable to articulate how to translate their considerable skills into the public arena, to actually become civically engaged.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN A COMMUNICATION
COURSE: A CASE STUDY

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To my parents, Alan and Carolyn Lamm, whose support has sustained me through my life and my career.

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To my friends who told me I could do it: Natalie Tindall, Belinda Stillion Southard, Elizabeth Marvin, Myonnie Bada, Ben Krueger, Tiffany Derville Gallicano, Nance McCown, Jill Cornelius Underhill, Sanja Sipek, Jessica Shevock-Johnson and Heidi Draheim.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Presently, civic engagement in higher education is a significant issue. It seems that instances of students becoming civically engaged are on an upswing (Jacoby, 2009). Although some scholars lament the drop in civic engagement in the United States, Jacoby (2009) and others argue that the 1990s "saw a dramatic increase in efforts to bring college and university resources to bear on both broad social issues and local problems" and that campus-community engagement has really taken off in recent years (p. 13). As communication scholars, one of our missions is, or should be, to enhance the communication skills that students need to be engaged citizens (Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams, 2008). The purpose of this study is to investigate how students in an upper level communication class perceive their role as engaged citizens and how their skills and desire to be civically engaged develop. I investigated the processes these students undertake throughout their time in the course to understand part of the path to becoming a civically engaged citizen in a democracy.

Overview

Clearly, civic engagement in higher education is a popular topic in 2009. Although the perception in the past was that civic engagement, especially by young people, has dropped off, this is changing. In his popular book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* Putnam (2000) argues that American participation in community and civic engagement has declined. But things are changing. As Jacoby and Associates argue (2009), and as the multitude of foundations and associations demonstrate, there has been a surge in democratic and civic education programs and initiatives since the 1990s.

Many civic engagement initiatives have been undertaken in higher education, both from within institutions of learning and in the private sector. Campus Compact (www.compact.org) is a coalition of university and college presidents dedicated to increasing civic engagement opportunities on their campuses. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) works with colleges and universities to provide resources for the enhancement of civic education. In 2003, the American Democracy Project was started by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. At Tufts, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) provides opportunities and research. Other associations include The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Higher Education Network for Community Engagement, and many disciplinary organizations have their own initiatives as well. Finally, several foundations, including the Kettering Foundation (www.kettering.org), the Bonner Foundation (www.bonner.org) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching have all done work in the area of civic engagement education.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a center dedicated to civic engagement, as do many universities and colleges. At UMCP, it is called the Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership (CCEL), also known as TerpImpact. "Consistent with the mission and strategic plan of the University of Maryland, the purpose of the Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership is to advance the education of students to become civically engaged citizens, scholars, and leaders in communities on campus and in the state, the nation, and the world" (www.TerpImact.umd.edu).

The role of public speaking in civic engagement cannot be overestimated. Also according to Putnam (2000), the types of engagement most on the decline were speaking and going to or participating in public meetings. Hogan et al. (2008) argue that "American are becoming *spectators* rather than *participants* in public life" (p. 4). They also note that in the twenty-first century, signs of a "rebirth" are apparent, as indicated by the proliferation of associations and foundations mentioned before. They also indicate the importance of new technology. However, their primary message is that, as a citizen in a democracy, one has not only the right, but the *obligation* to become a responsible citizen-speaker, one who has not only talent to share their voice, but who has an ethical responsibility for effective and honest communication. As they put it, "If you hope to participate fully as a citizen, you need to learn *how* to speak with confidence and skill" (p. 14).

Is public speaking still relevant and important today? Hildbrandt (1988) notes that, although oral rhetoric took precedence in ancient Greek and Rome (the foundational cultures of western rhetorical tradition), letter writing gained prominence in the Medieval era. As people in the 21st century rely more and more on Internet-based communication, the rhetorical principles of letter writing may well become, once again, more central to rhetorical practice and effective citizenship.

Definition of Civic Engagement

So what is civic engagement? Jacoby and Associates (2009) argue that a clear definition of civic engagement difficult to identify. She uses the Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership's definition to guide her work: "Civic engagement is defined

as acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one's communities. This includes a wide range of activities, including developing civic sensitivity, participation in building civil society, and benefitting the common good. Civic engagement encompasses the notions of global citizenship and interdependence. Through civic engagement, individuals—as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world—are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world" (p. 9).

Adler and Goggin (2005) define civic engagement as "the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (p. 236). Scholars assert that political participation and civic engagement have declined in recent years, as evidenced in part by lower voter turnout (Wilkins, 2000; Putnam, 1995, 2000). Interestingly, much of the research on civic engagement has focused on the role of media in encouraging or discouraging political and civic participation.

These definitions serve as a beginning, or starting point, for this researcher's definition of civic engagement. Although heuristic, they do not necessarily reflect what students today think about civic engagement. It seems that students do not want to talk about politics, and as some authors point out, students feel that that they cannot make a difference through traditional political routes. Therefore, the definition grounding this research is similar to Adler and Goggin's (2005) definition: "working in one's community to make a positive social difference."

Theoretical Rationale

The rhetorical tradition (Hogan et al., 2008) focuses on the importance of learning to speak, to think critically, and to understand the histories behind the speakers and speeches in the United States. Starting with the study of learning to speak, the communication discipline dates back to ancient times, with thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero. Quintilian's focus was that the speaker be also a "good man" (p. 8). Despite the ancestry of the topic, civic engagement and public speaking are very different today. We live in a diverse society that asks of us much more than ever before in terms of our public speeches. But the rhetorical tradition teaches us "that public speaking in a democratic society must be grounded in a strong code of ethics and a commitment to the common good" (p. 8-9).

The second aspect of the rhetorical tradition that applies to civic engagement is learning to think critically and evaluate or critique speeches that we hear. Hogan et al. (2008) believe it is important to teach students in communication (public speaking) classes to be aware of demagoguery and faulty appeals. "We must demand that all who speak in public live up to high ethical standards, promoting not just their own self-interests but for the common good" (p. 10).

Finally, in the rhetorical tradition, students learn the lessons of the past. Hogan et al. (2008) state that "One of the best ways to learn about our past is to study the great speakers and speeches of American history" (p. 10). This is where a public speaking or other communication class is important. In teaching the rhetorical tradition to our students, we are ideally setting them up for a lifetime of civic engagement.

Civic Engagement and Media Use. The argument that television's entertainment function explains, at least in part, the decline of social capital by "creating superficial community experiences" (Wilkins, 2000, p. 571; Putnam, 1995) has been widely discussed. Others blame distrust of political institutions on the nature of news, which focuses on political scandal. The decline in trust of the media seems to correlate with decline in trust of government (Gunther, 1992). Recent research has focused on the Internet's role in civic participation. Is it a link between the public and government, or between publics? Kellner (1995) asserts that this new technology may promote democratic debate.

A term often associated with civic engagement research is "social capital." Putnam (1995) defines social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (p. 664-665). Social capital is connections and the trust and norms that are inherent in those connections. This term, which will be discussed in detail in chapter two, is used when discussing political participation, but they are not the same thing. Political participation "refers to our relations with political institutions. Social capital refers to our relations with one another" (Putnam, 1995, p. 665). Civic engagement centers on "people's connections with the life of their communities, not merely with politics" (p. 665), although it is correlated with political participation, and with social trust (that is, we join groups with people whom we trust).

Putnam (1995) argues that television is to blame for the decline in American social capital. Patterson (1993) also critiques the media, arguing that the journalistic instinct is to distrust large institutions and focus on campaign strategy at the expense of

the issues. Norris (1996) defends television, suggesting the relationship is more complex

than television viewing equals no civic engagement. Americans who tune in to programs

like *Nightline, C-SPAN, Meet the Press,* or *CNN World News,* are likely to be interested

in American politics.

Another author who contends that the relationship between media and social

capital is complex is Wilkins (2000). Wilkins found that political participation is

associated with civic engagement on the local level. She asserts, "people who perceive

themselves to be actively involved in their communities and in community organizations,

as one indication of social capital, are more likely to participate in electoral politics than

those who do not" (p. 575-576). Concerning the role of media, "people who attend to

television news or newspapers are more likely to participate in electoral politics than

those who do not" (p. 577). She also found that the role of the computer remains

exclusive to the elite. Thus, blaming television for the decline in civic engagement is not

a complex enough argument. Instead, news watching and reading are important

indicators of political participation.

Shah (1998) contends that television might not be all that bad, depending on the

type of shows watched. Shah also looks at the link between civic engagement and trust (a

tenet of social capital). The results do not support the idea that trust is a necessary

precursor to participation in the community. Further, television viewing is both positive

and negative, depending on the genre. Newspaper reading and social drama viewing are

positively associated with civic engagement, and science fiction viewing is negatively

associated.

An additional study that confirms that informational uses of mass media are positively related to the production of social capital is Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001). For younger Americans, it is the Internet, used for information exchange, that influences trust (a component of social capital) and civic participation, as opposed to traditional print and broadcast news media.

Communication is what mediates community integration (social capital) and local political participation (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 2000). McLeod et al. hypothesized that the more one uses mass media, the greater the interpersonal discussion of local issues. They also observe that television and newspaper hard news use and interpersonal discussion about political issues are related (positively and directly) to local political knowledge. The researcher discovered that "Watching local television hard news is most strongly predicted by local political interest and therefore seems to be the form of communication most often used to fulfill the need for immediate local political information" (p. 329). They also found, not surprisingly, that people who were most active in standard civic affairs were most likely to agree to participate in a local community forum.

Finally, Kanervo, Zhang, and Sawyer (2005) completed a review of 24 empirical studies of communication and democratic participation. They offer several broad conclusions based on their analysis. First, newspaper reading and television news viewing (though weaker than newspaper reading) are positively related to "trust, efficacy, interest, and both civic and political participation" (p. 204). Second, television entertainment viewing is negatively linked to these areas. Third, efficacy is "positively linked to civic and political participation" and fourth, "interpersonal trust and institutional

trust are positively related to civic participation but trust in government appears to be negatively linked to voting behavior" (p. 204). One shortcoming of this analysis is that no studies looked at the new medium of the Internet, which will become increasingly important in our research on civic engagement.

Other variables. Scheufele and Shah (2000) found that self-confidence and opinion leadership, termed "personality strength," impacts all dimensions of social capital. Informational variables, such as hard news media use, have weak effects limited to civic engagement and not the broader category of social capital. Interest in politics was also weakly linked to civic engagement. This research suggests that appealing to the opinion leaders may be more effective than simply disseminating information to the public, for information is not linked with engagement or social capital in the same way that personality strength is.

In Practice, in the classroom. Campbell (2008) studied open classrooms and how that climate fosters civic and political engagement among adolescents. He found that not only does an open climate foster civic knowledge and engagement, but that these classes can compensate for the "civic disadvantages" of lower income students. Thus, it is more than just taking a civics class, but it is the classroom environment in that class that determines civic engagement.

Brammer and Wolter (2008) offer a compelling look at a new course designed with civic engagement in mind. Replacing their department's public speaking course, at Gustavus Adolphus College, is "Public Discourse", in which students must complete a

semester-long civic engagement project, with the concomitant speeches and interpersonal communication necessary to complete such a project. In their study of this new course, Brammer and Wolter found increased interest in being civically engaged as well as increased confidence in public speaking. This course can provide a model for communication departments around the country interested in integrating civic engagement more directly into their curriculum.

Before we can understand why students become civically engaged, we can try to understand how students become civically engaged. Specifically, this study is interested in how students in communication classes become civically engaged and if their rhetorical training does indeed have any influence on their propensity for engagement.

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation is to explore the evolution of students' civic engagement skills and proclivities throughout the course of an upper-level communication class. It seeks to answer several key questions:

1. What do communication students think it means to be civically engaged?

2. How does an upper-level communication course contribute to the development of civic engagement in college students?

3. What skills do students consider most important in being civically engaged?

4. How do students perceive that public speaking and debate are related to civic engagement?

Organization of Dissertation

In the next chapter, I outline the research on civic engagement in higher education that informs this study. Chapter three will outline qualitative methodology and in particular grounded theory and case study methodology. Chapter four provides the results of the study, and the final chapter will provide interpretations and implications for this research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To understand the results of this study, multiple areas of research must be consulted. First, the definition and history of civic engagement in higher education are explored. The concept of social capital is also explored. Next, some of the studies that have demonstrated a decline in American civic engagement are reviewed, and a potential resurgence is documented. Self-regulated learning is an important concept that is explored here and in the conclusion. Media literacy also is defined and briefly analyzed. Finally, the concepts of critical, ethical, and empathic listening prove important to this study.

What is Civic Engagement?

According to Jacoby (2009), civic engagement is difficult to define, and definitions are "broad and multifaceted" (p. 7). While skills and knowledge are certainly components, so are values, motivation and commitment. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), there are three core categories of civic engagement: "community participation, political engagement, and political voice" (Jacoby, 2009). There are nineteen indicators of civic engagement within these categories. These indicators range from volunteering, voting, and signing petitions, to boycotting, canvassing, and protesting (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002). Like many definitions, it is a checklist more than a coherent definition.

The Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership (CCEL) at the University of Maryland (2005) defines civic engagement as "acting upon a heightened sense of

responsibility to one's communities. This includes a wide range of activities, including developing civic sensitivity, participation in building civil society, and benefitting the common good. Civic engagement encompasses the notions of global citizenship and interdependence. Through civic engagement, individuals—as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world—are empowered agents of positive social change for a more democratic world." As stated in chapter one, the definition guiding this paper is "working in one's community to make a positive social difference."

Current Groups that Promote Civic Engagement

Campus Compact was founded in 1985 as a coalition of university and college presidents who are interested in furthering civic engagement on their campuses. The coalition has published two books to help students become leaders, *Raise Your Voice: A Student Guide to Positive Social Change* (Cone, Kiesa, and Longo) and *Students as Colleagues: Expanding the Circle of Service-Learning Leadership* (Zlotkowski, Longo, and Williams). Their website, www.compact.org, provides a clearinghouse of information for those interested in promoting engagement on their campuses.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has two programs dedicated to civic engagement, the Center for Liberal Education and Civic Engagement and Bringing Theory to Practice. Their recent publication is titled *Civic Engagement at the Center: Building Democracy through Integrated Cocurricular and Curricular Experiences*. Bringing Theory to Practice also offers grants and conferences.

Based at Tufts University, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) provides extensive research on civic engagement

and higher education. Their website, www.civicyouth.org, provides many resources on college and non-college young people.

A Brief History of Civic Engagement in Higher Education

Civic engagement has always been central to of the mission of higher education (Smith, 1994). Since Harvard was founded in 1636, one of the expressed purposes of higher education was preparation for civic and community life. In fact, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson considered higher education and responsible participation "essential to the success of Democracy" (Lawry et al., 2006).

Following the Revolutionary War, the focus shifted from the preparation of the individual to the building of a new nation (Boyer, 1994). In 1862, the Land-Grant Act forever linked universities with civic engagement as related to agriculture and industry. John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* called for education to engage students in the community and stressed the value of faculty-student collaboration. In the first half of the 20th century, however, there were very few campus initiatives in response to this.

With the election of FDR, the Great Depression, and World War II, research universities became more involved with the federal government, significantly the GI Bill and the National Science Foundation. In 1957, the launch of Sputnik encouraged the subsequent National Defense Education Act of 1958. In 1961 the Peace Corps was founded, followed by the 1965 Volunteers in Service to America. Prior to the 1960s, college students had served in their communities through organizations like 4-H, Scouting, and fraternities and sororities. But service learning really took off in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1980s, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) published *Habits of the Heart*, arguing that Americas were more individualistic and less concerned with the common good than ever before. Partly because of this call, Campus Compact was formed in 1985. Community service subsequently grew dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. The National Community Service Act of 1990 authorized the federal agency the Commission on National and Community Service, whose mission was to provide support for service and service-learning programs in K-12 and college. In 1993, President Clinton signed the bill that created the Corporation for National and Community Service, whose programs include Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, USA Freedom Corps, and Learn and Serve America.

More recently, civic engagement has been integrated into majors and academics through courses, living-learning programs, orientation programs, leadership development courses, and multi-cultural education. Of course, service learning and civic engagement are not the same thing, but viewing service learning in terms of civic engagement enables the space for communication about how service learning connects to community, citizenship, and democracy (Morton and Battistoni, 1995)

Campus-community partnerships became more popular in the 1990s. Boyer (1990) called for the scholarship of engagement—connecting the resources of the university with social, civic and ethical programs. The 1990s also saw a rise in concern with apathy due partly to Putnam's work (1995; 2000) *Bowling Alone,* which argued that Americans were experiencing a significant decrease in political and civic participation. There is new evidence, however, that indicates that college students might be more engaged than we think.

The Call for Higher Education to Rededicate itself to Civic Engagement

Key to defining civic engagement and its importance is understanding democracy. Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich and Corngold (2007) observe, "democracy is fundamentally a practice of shared responsibility for a common future" (p. 25). Working toward public goals and making shared choices for the social and common good are key tenets of a participatory democracy. Of course, not all scholars have always thought that the public *should* participate. Even into the 1970s, scholars argued that the elite should rule because the public is not smart enough to handle the responsibility. Today, there are still skeptics who believe that promoting democracy is not the business of higher education. Primary or secondary school civics and social studies courses are the only appropriate places for this kind of education, if that. Some argue that the family is the place where students should learn about political participation.

Some modern scholars, however, believe that "relatively broad based participation" is a hallmark of democracy. The authors of *Educating for Democracy* agree with this definition, and emphasize that institutions of higher education should be seeking to enhance students' abilities to be civically engaged (Colby et al., 2007). Research indicates that participation in democracy helps people let go of inaccurate beliefs and also lowers crime, lowers taxes, and strengthens schools.

Although much research points to Americans becoming less engaged in recent years, Bartels (2000) notes that while it is true that fewer Americans participate, those who do are more partisan and ideological than any time in the past 50 years. He encourages increased participation of "ordinary" Americans, and believes this will "temper" the extreme polarization we are seeing in politics today.

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So what is participation in democracy? Even if one defines participation as simply voting, the public still needs to have the basic knowledge and skills to make informed decisions. If democracy is indeed about participation, as these and many other authors assert, and if education's mission is to support democracy, then education needs to "contribute actively" to this goal and to help students make these informed decisions. Participation can include voting, as well as writing to elected officials or even running for office. It also can be direct, local, and non-conventional, such as community decision-making and informal political discussions. "The notion is that citizens work together to mediate differences so they can establish and achieve shared goals that contribute to the public good. This form of political engagement may intend to influence government action, but often it does not" (Colby et al., 2007, p. 30). This broad understanding of participation includes Internet participation, such as "netroots" activists (Schneider, 2005). Zukin and others (2006) note that to students in high school and college, wearing clothing to call attention to social and political values is one type of engagement.

Social Capital

Social capital refers to the social networks and "norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" that come from these networks. Unlike physical capital, which would be actual physical objects, or human capital, which would be characteristics of individuals, such as intelligence, social capital "calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). The first known use of the term has been credited to the supervisor of the West Virginia public schools in 1916, L.J. Hanifan. He wrote about the importance of

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community involvement for school success. No one seemed to notice his writings, however, and several other authors and researchers used the term starting in the 1950s. It was not until the late 1980s that sociologist James S. Coleman used the term and it gained popularity. He also used it in the context of education (Putnam, 2000).

There are two aspects of social capital, individual and public. On an individual level, people with more social networks experience, for example, better career advancement. They also, of course, simply have the benefits of friendship and companionship. On the public side, social capital involves generalized reciprocity, which makes societies more efficient. This is because people can get a lot more accomplished when there is trust among them. If there is a mutual obligation to take care of each other, society functions better.

On the other hand, social capital is not always a positive thing. As Putnam (2000) points out, it was social capital that allowed Timothy McVeigh to bomb the federal building in Oklahoma City. Urban gangs are another strong example of social reciprocity gone awry.

It is important to make the distinction between bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) forms of social capital. Bonding social groups "reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups" (p. 22). Ethnic organizations or private country clubs are examples of bonding social organizations. They may create strong out-group hostility. Bridging networks link people and groups and lubricate social life. According to Putnam (2000), many groups are simultaneously bridging and bonding, such as the Knights of Columbus, who bridge ethnic groups but bond among a common religious tradition.

Decline in American Civic Engagement

When Putnam wrote *Bowling Alone* in 2000, he argued that American civic

engagement had been in a decline for the latter third of the century. He is emphatic that

"community bonds have not weakened steadily throughout our history" but rather that

there have been rises and falls all along the way. However, he carefully documents the

decline in political, social, and religious participation in the last third of this century.

"The dominant theme is simple: For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a

powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their

communities, but a few decades ago—silently, without warning—that tide reversed and

we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been

pulled apart from one another and our communities over the last third of the century"

(Putnam, 2000, p. 27). Although there are many reasons for this, the overarching

problem is simply the change in generations. As older Americans, more politically

engaged Americans, pass away, newer Americans coming of age are not as interested in

voting and participating.

Americans voted at a rate of 48.9 percent in 1996, the lowest turnout of the

twentieth century. "Participation in presidential elections has declined by roughly a

quarter over the last thirty-six years. Turnout in off-year and local elections is down by

roughly this same amount" (Putnam, 2000, p. 32). This drop masks the real decrease

because for decades many Americans had been hampered in their access to the vote by

"hurdles of registration" and, in the South, Jim Crow laws. For the last four decades,

however, laws such as "motor voter" have increased access to voting and since 1965,

with the Voting Rights Act, millions more Americans had access to the polls. But,

"fewer and fewer of the rest of us who had had the right to vote all along are now actually exercising it" (p. 33). This is blamed, primarily, on the generational gap. As older Americans die, younger, less interested Americans take their place. These Baby Boomers and Generation Xers do not vote, watch or read the news, or participate in their government at the same rate as the Greatest Generation and previous generations.

Americans are still paying attention to national elections and talking about politics with their neighbors. But the percentage rate is skewed by the fact that older Americans are more interested today while the youth are less interested. If this generation gap persists, Americans will see an all-time low in civic engagement in the future. Interestingly, the party organizations are bigger, stronger, and richer than ever. At the same time, party identification dropped over 10 percent. There also has been a strong decline in the number of people who have attended a political meeting or worked for a political party. Signing petitions, writing letters to Congress and making speeches also have declined drastically since the 1970s. Finally, Americans trust the government less today than even in the 1960s, when most Americans reported the belief that the government would do what is right most of the time.

Alexis de Tocqueville called America a nation of joiners, whose people are involved in countless organizations. In fact, Americans are involved in more organizations than most other countries on earth, except a few northern European nations. However, most of these organizations are concentrated in Washington, DC and are "professionally staffed advocacy organizations, not member-centered, locally based associations" (Putnam, 2000, p. 51). Once again, we see that in the first two-thirds of the century, Americans' involvement in civic associations rose, with the exception of during

the Great Depression, and during the latter third of the century, only "mailing list

memberships" increased.

A Resurgence in College Students?

There is evidence that college students are among the most civically engaged

group in America. Civic engagement is generally higher among college graduates than

non-college graduates as well. "There is evidence that civic engagement declines and

changes in character several years after college" (Vogelgesang and Astin, 2005).

"Despite this evidence, there is still a common view that college students are not as

engaged as expected" (Lopez and Kiesa, 2008). However, Portney and O'Leary (2007) at

Tufts University conducted a survey and found that 28% of college students reported that

they are involved in their communities; 2/3 knew the name of at least one Senator from

their state. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) reports that 67% of 2006

incoming freshman said helping others is essential or very important.

Despite this news, and despite a rise in involvement since 2000, involvement still

has not reached the levels it was in the 1960s and 1970s, even if we take into account all

the new activities that "count" as engagement (Sax, 2004). Still, it is important to note

that some students, like the ones in this study, are highly engaged, and college is an

important time for developing the skills of engagement. Colby et al. (2007) note that

there are more *forms* of participation than ever; still, there are lower rates of participation

overall. Instead, students are more involved in activities like volunteering, believing that

this is a better use of their time than, say, conventional politics. Colby et al., however,

believe that it is important to distinguish between community service and political

activity, because while some community service counts as engagement, not all does. As Galston (2001) argues, "nonpolitical civic engagement does not guarantee political participation" (Colby et al, 2007). Colby et al. do *not* count as political many of the activities we will see in the students in this study, such as tutoring or park cleaning, or other civic activities focused on building social capital. Personal commitments, such as boycotts (consumer activism) or personal attempts at energy conservation, would also be excluded. Attempting to instigate change is what is required in their definition of political engagement.

Fortunately, there is a relationship between civic volunteerism and political participation. First, "participating in civic activities incorporates people into social networks that may encourage or invite their political activity, or encourage them to take a political stance or act on a political issue" (Colby et. al, 2007, p. 36). Second, "civic capacities" are developed; in other words, skills such as communication and advocacy are developed which can then be used in political participation. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), these types of skills may be the most important predictors of future political participation. They also found that students who are active politically were more likely to have participated in community service and other activities while in high school. There are only certain skills, however, that translate to political service, such as letter writing, public speaking, and decision making. Certainly, many volunteer organizations do not foster or develop these skills in every member. "If you want students to develop political skills, it is much more effective to engage them in overtly political activities than to hope that they will gain these skills through a set of activities that is likely to be quite removed from political action" (Colby et al, 2007, p. 38).

The question is, do we want students to develop political skills? This research challenges Colby et al.'s (2007) definition of civic engagement as necessarily politics-focused. The students interviewed for this study were content to make a difference in their communities apart from formal political participation. They were doing good work and making a difference; perhaps this is the new face of civic engagement.

The current generation of college students present a different scenario than that of students who are involved civically solely through politics. Kiesa, Orlowski, Levine, Both, Kirby, Lopez and Marcelo (2007) found that Millennials, the current college-age generation of students, are ambivalent about formal politics. They are much more comfortable getting involved with local and community based service. They do still seek ways to engage politically and seek ways to be authentically engaged in conversations about politics. Kiesa et al. (2007) also found that today's Millenials are more engaged than Generation X; much of Putnam's (2000) research was conducted when Generation X was in college, so things are changing.

The voter turnout rate, one measure of engagement, also is increasing. "The voter turnout rate for college students increased the most of all young people, between 2002 and 2006, it rose 2 percentage points to 27%, and 12 percentage points between 2000 and 2004 to 59%. College graduates have the highest voter turnout of all 18-25 year olds, at 35% in 2006 and 67% in 2004. Young people with no college experience voted at the lowest rates. In the 2004 presidential election, 88 percent of college students registered, and 88% of those voted" (Lopez and Kiesa, 2009). Students are most likely to vote if they are registered on their campus.

Young people today, as opposed to the 1990s, are more active and want to be more engaged, but view the political candidates as inaccessible and their views of politics and elections are not very high. Politics are viewed as an inefficient vehicle for change. (Kiesa et al., 2007) In a CIRCLE working paper, "the authors find that young adults (those between the ages of 16 and 30 at baseline) who make academic progress over a four-year period are also more likely to participate in civic activities such as voting, volunteering, and accessing social media to discuss current events" (Finlay and Flanagan, 2009). One way to make academic progress which enhances engagement is in specific courses. Several of those courses are discussed in the following section.

Civic Engagement in Practice in the Classroom

Campbell (2008) looked at what he calls "open classroom climates." An open classroom climate is one in which discussion of political issues is allowed and encouraged. He found that this facilitates the acquisition of knowledge about civics. "In classrooms where students are exposed to real world political issues, they are introduced to the lifeblood of participatory democracy, namely discourse and debate" (p. 440). This was true despite any income level differences in the students. Typically, students in higher income brackets report being more engaged. Open classroom climates can "level the playing field."

At Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota, the Communication Studies Department changed their basic course from Public Speaking to Public Discourse. In this course, each student must choose a community issue (either college, town, or hometown) and prepare speeches and an action plan to solve that issue. They take this outside of the

classroom as well, which is what makes this course unique. There are seven steps they take to complete this project.

First, students select a project and analyze the problem in a 5-6 minute in-class presentation. This is the first of two in-class speeches. Second, students complete a thorough research review, in which they discuss all the research surrounding the problem in their community and in other communities that have faced similar problems. This is presented as a paper. The second in-class speech is an 8-9 minute advocacy presentation, in which they advocate for their change to solve the problem and show that their solution is the best and most workable for that particular problem. The next step, step four, is another written assignment, the action plan, which is a detailed review of potential actions to solve the problem. Step five is key; this is where they must take action in the community with direct communication of some sort. Examples include letters to the editor, meetings with town officials, demonstrations or petition-signing, or even raising money for an organization. Students must provide documentation that they actually completed this step. Step six is a paper called the action review, which analyzes what worked, what did not and what was learned. Finally, a final reflection reviews what each student learned about civic engagement that semester.

Brammer and Wolters (2008) studied the final semester of regular public speaking and the initial semester of public discourse students to compare results. They found increases in civic engagement, and they found this new course encourages students to be active citizens. Students reported an increased awareness of issues in their communities as well. Key for public speaking pedagogy is that they also reported gaining more confidence in public speaking. They also reported higher gains in skill development.

The authors suggest that it is because they are testing their public speaking skills in real-life situations, even though they do less speaking in the class. These results are based on self-reports, so there is no proof of actual skills increases, just reported skills increases and reported confidence increases.

Other campuses have organizations that teach students how to get involved or have campus-wide initiatives that focus on civic engagement. One example of such a school with an outcomes assessment-based approach is Alverno College, a private women's college in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Their curriculum includes eight competencies related to civic engagement, each of which are divided into six levels. Students must demonstrate mastery at a level four on all eight competencies before they are able to graduate. To assess this process, Alverno uses a "diagnostic digital portfolio," which serves as a record of the student's work. Alverno also trains all students in listening.

Another small liberal arts school with a focus on engagement is Tusculum College in Tennessee. Their required Commons Curriculum includes courses on engagement, such as "Citizenship and Social Change: Theory and Practice." They also have a strong service learning component. Tusculum also has multiple competencies, divided into multiple subcategories each, for example the Ethics of Social Responsibility competency has subcategories such as Civic Responsibility and Social Change, Diversity and the Common Good, and Individual and Community.

Other campuses serve the communities in which they live and have programs in place to ensure that service occurs. Portland State University, in Portland, Oregon, for example, has a general education component called University Studies which emphasizes

civic involvement. Portland State University is also a leader in what Boyer (1990) called the scholarship of engagement, which is research and teaching related to the community in which the campus exists. Students take courses at every stage of their education in University Studies, where the goals include "The student will become aware of the consequences of his or her actions on others," and "The student will realize the value and importance of service to their community" (Colby et al, 2003, p. 58).

Spelman College, an historically black women's college in Atlanta, Georgia, uses several different programs and courses to attain the goal of civic and community engagement. Students there take a yearlong freshman orientation program. In addition, there is a required first-year course, a required sophomore assembly program, courses in academic departments, and many clubs are coordinated through their Johnetta B. Cole Center for Community Service and Community Building. Courses include "Urban Education" during which students are placed in the community to work to revitalize the local schools. Another required course, "The African Diaspora and the World," is a year-long writing-intensive course.

These are but a few of the examples described by Colby et al. (2003). Presently, universities and colleges of all types are taking the initiative to encourage engagement in students. As the literature indicates, students are very involved in their communities, but perhaps political ties are not being made as effectively. The students in our study were engaged in the community but perhaps not as politically involved, with the exception of Brandon, who has served one year on the Student Government Association and is majoring in Government and Politics. The University of Maryland has taken initiative in the form of the Center for Civic Engagement and Learning, CIVICUS, and Beyond the

Classroom; the latter two are living-and-learning programs. A recent article in Maryland's *Terp Magazine* highlighted a variety of recent civic work students are doing, but it is volunteer-based on not as political as Colby et al. (2007) would hope. The focus instead appears to be on "service-learning," one aspect of civic engagement.

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a model of learning that attempts to combine cognition, motivation and social context to explain how students learn. It asks, what do students do to set goals, and work toward those goals, as constrained by their motivation and social contexts? Pintrich (2000), one of the most influential SRL researchers, defined SRL as a learner's ability to control, regulate and monitor their cognition, motivation and behavior as constrained by their goals and their context. SRL is *not* a trait or a fixed ability. Students might be more or less self-regulatory than others, and this can vary drastically by domain. Students can learn to be more self-regulated, and teachers should model self-regulation and teach strategies for students to use when learning. What is so appealing about this model, which became extremely popular during the 1980s and remains highly-researched today, is that it places the emphasis and the onus on the student for their own learning.

There are three key components to any definition of SRL, no matter what theoretical perspective one takes. First, to be self-regulated, students must be metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally "active participants" in their own learning (Zimmerman, 1986). Second, SRL involves a cyclical process, or feedback loop, in which students monitor their learning and the effectiveness of their strategies and

alter these strategies if they are not working. Finally, most definitions will involve providing reasons why students choose particular self-regulated strategies or responses (Zimmerman, 2001).

One of the easiest ways to understand SRL is to use Zimmerman's (2000) model, which has three phases that are all highly interdependent and reliant on each other. The three phases correspond with before, during, and after a learning episode: forethought, performance, and self-reflection.

During the forethought phase, two sub-phases occur: task-analysis and self-motivation. In task-analysis, a learner must understand the problem and determine which strategies to use. Studies show that students who take the time to plan do better (Alexander, 2006). Clearly, though, many students do not do this, and educators are not making this process apparent enough. During self-motivation, a student needs several things: motivation, interest, knowledge of themselves as a learner (this is called being a schematic learner), and self-efficacy. Bandura has been a leader of motivation and self-efficacy research and has found, not surprisingly, that students with higher levels of self-efficacy persist longer and try harder (Bandura & Cervone, 1986; Schunk, 1991; Alexander, 2006).

Performance refers to the actual learning event. This stage includes self-control and self-observation. Self-control means using the strategies selected during task-analysis. Self-observation is the tricky part: the student must monitor whether or not their selected strategies are working and, if not, make changes.

Finally, during self-reflection, the learner engages in self-judgment and self-reaction. Judgment involves determining how well the strategies worked and reaction

involves deciding to make changes the next time around. For example, if studying with note cards worked very well for a particular student, the student would decide to keep these in a file and use note cards for every test.

We know some things about novices and experts that make this process much less smooth than it sounds. Novice learners (in general, or in a specific domain) are not good at planning, at selecting strategies, or at monitoring their strategy use. They often self-regulate in response to events ("I didn't know anything at the review session, I guess I should re-read my notes.") and they compare themselves to others, leading to beliefs of intelligence or ability as fixed and not related to effort (these are negative attributions, and attribution theory plays a huge part in learning). Experts are more likely to attribute both successes and failures to effort, and to practice and study for hours at a time for the sheer enjoyment of it. They also know how to select appropriate strategies and monitor their strategy use.

Motivation. One of the key components of self-regulated learning is motivation. Students who are motivated tend to work harder and persist longer (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). Several studies have looked at the role of motivation in self-regulated learning.   Wolters and Rosenthal (2000) studied the relationship between motivational beliefs and motivational practices in eighth grade students. The found that, on the whole, "students' beliefs about the value of the material they are learning, their self-efficacy for learning the material, and their orientation toward learning and performance goals help to explain reported use of the five motivation regulation strategies examined" (p. 814). In other words, for the most part, motivational beliefs are

related to motivational strategies used. Pokay and Blumenfeld (1990) also studied

strategy use and motivational beliefs, this time at two points in the semester with high

school geometry students. They discovered that early in the semester, expectancies and

value predicted strategy use; later in the semester, only value predicted strategy use.

Clearly, motivation impacts what strategies students use, and whether or not they self-

regulate, and how.

Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) found that students who were motivated to learn for

the sake of learning and not for the sake of grades and who found intrinsic value in their

work were more likely to self-regulate. Thus, "motivation to learn is an important

component to be considered in our models of how students come to use different

cognitive strategies and become self-regulating learners" (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990, p.

37). Schunk (1996) determined that learning goals, with or without self-evaluation, and

performance goals with self-evaluation, led to higher motivation in study 1. In study 2,

the learning goal students had higher motivation than those with a performance goal task.

When students set learning goals, they learn for the sake of learning; when students set

performance goals, their goal is to get an A or look intelligent, but not necessarily to

learn. As these two studies show, a learning goal framework is necessary to more

effectively self-regulate.

Media Literacy

According to Potter (2008), "Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we

actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we

encounter" (p. 19). Christ (2004) notes that media literacy has different meanings in

different contexts and to different scholars. He lists several elements of media literacy that are generally accepted in any definition: first, "media are constructed and construct reality; (b) Media have commercial implications; (c) Media have ideological and political implications; (d) Form and content are related in each medium, each of which has unique aesthetics, codes, and conventions; and (e) Receivers negotiate meaning in media" (p. 93). Additionally, the National Communication Association has media literacy standards, albeit for K-12. Most media literacy work focuses on K-12, but it is increasingly being recognized as an important component of higher education (Christ & Potter, 1998).

The National Communication Association (1998) lists five standards for media literate communicators. They must have knowledge of how people use media; they must have knowledge of the relationship between audience and media; they must have knowledge and understanding about how media is contextual; they must understand the commercial makeup of media; and finally, they need the ability to use media to communicate to an audience. Only the last of these standards focuses on skills, the ability to use media. The other standards are all about having knowledge about media.

According to Potter (2008), there are seven skills involved in being media literate: analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstracting. Certainly these are also the skills we use in critically thinking in any realm of our lives. The first skill, analysis, requires digging deeper into a media source than simply the surface details. It means going beyond what a journalist reports and breaking the story down into its parts.

Evaluation means making a judgment based on what one heard. There is evidence that people simply take news at face value without evaluating (Potter, 2008). Grouping describes the process of classifying elements in a story together based on a system that we create, not one that was given by the media. Induction refers to taking a small amount of evidence and generalizing to a larger conclusion. Unfortunately, much evidence shows that many Americans use faulty induction strategies. For example, although crime has been steadily decreasing in America, most people think it is on the increase because of the stories they see in the media. Deduction, on the other hand, is using general examples to explain particulars. According to Potter, "When we have faulty general principles, we will explain particular occurrences in a faulty manner" (p. 18). His example is that many Americans have a faulty view of the media and believe it has overly negative effects on the public.

Synthesis requires taking in new information and comparing it to what we already know. Every time we hear a new message in the news, we must synthesize it with what we already know. Finally, abstracting describes the process of creating brief descriptions of the message just heard. The key is to capture the "big picture" in a paraphrase.

Media literacy occurs along a continuum. People are not "media literate" or "not-media literate," but rather have various degrees of literacy. Obviously, children naturally have lower levels of literacy than adults, but it varies widely among adults from experiential exploring, to critical appreciation, to social responsibility. Those who are on the social responsibility end of the spectrum view media not only in terms of themselves, and what it best for them, but for society at large. People can be at different places on this continuum depending on the medium they are watching. For example, many people

"veg out" when watching certain types of television programming, but are still able to critically analyze news and literature.

Kellner and Shaer (2007) argue that critical media literacy is necessary for a twenty-first-century democracy. In their view, media literacy courses would teach the skills needed to use the media as "instruments of social communication and change" (p. 62). This requires a "democratic pedagogy" which shares power with students. They use cultural studies and critical pedagogy as starting points for a new pedagogy of critical media literacy. They claim that universities should be "at the forefront of this movement" (p. 67).

Listening

There are multiple purposes for listening, from appreciate to critical to empathic. Critical listening is important for an engaged citizen, but we cannot overlook the significance of empathic listening. It is also important to understand the ethical implications of the practice of listening.

Critical Listening. According to Wolvin and Coakley (1996), "critical listening is listening to comprehend and then evaluate the message" (p. 316). Critical listening is linked to critical thinking, which includes several skills, including analysis and inference, synthesis and evaluation. It is necessary to prepare to be a critical listener by being an informed citizen (Hogan et al., 2008). Hogan et al. state that listening is a responsibility of an engaged citizen because when we listen, "we show respect for their views and are able to respond more thoughtfully and intelligently to their concerns" (p. 80). The goal is

to express the desire for communication and collaboration, for true dialogue. We should, in a democracy, respect everyone's views even if we disagree. This is no easy task, and as we will see, many students listen for the purpose of being ready to challenge the other speaker. This is where empathic listening plays a role; listening for the sake of being a comfort or support to the other person may be just as important in our modern democracy.

Empathic Listening. Empathic listening is a difficult concept with many meanings. One of they keys to empathic listening is that it means "to be respectful of the dignity of others" (Bruneau, 1993, p.194). It is a "love of the wisdom found in others whoever they may be" (p. 194). To truly listen to another person, the listener must find some empathic understanding of why the other person responds and s/he does.

Clark and Gudaitis (1996) differentiate between empathic listening and therapeutic listening. First, they explore the various definitions of empathy, which basically define the concept as being able to see things from another person's perspective. This requires the listener to attend to verbal and nonverbal cues of the speaker. There are also cognitive abilities involved (Burleson, 1983). These abilities include open-mindedness and the ability to be self-aware as one listens non-judgmentally. Unlike therapy or therapeutic listening, empathic listening does not involve giving advice (Clark and Gudaitis, 1996). This is what differentiates those of us who listen empathically as friends from those who listen therapeutically as professionals. In fact, the three keys to empathic listening are that the listeners is non-judgmental, and that s/he listening voluntarily and intimately.

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Thus, empathic listening is a "process of confirmation and validation" (Clark and Gudaitis, 1996, p. 18). There are four basic assumptions of empathic listening. First, there is the assumption that every person has the capacity to become an empathic listener. Second, empathic listening requires feedback because it is a transactional process. Third, empathic listening is driven by both emotion and cognition; the two are impossible to separate. Finally, empathic listening requires contextual sensitivity, or understanding the unique situation in which one may find themselves.

Walker (1997) reviews the scant literature on empathic listening and determines that this type of listening requires three components. First, the listener needs to make an active emotional commitment to the work of listening. The listener must put aside his or her own wants or needs and actively respond, both verbally and nonverbally. Second, the listener must take on the role of the other person (role-taking). In other words, the listener "makes a perceptual shift from their viewpoint to the viewpoint of the other party" (Walker, 1997, p. 132). Burke's (1945, 1950) theory of identification discussed role-taking in empathy. He believed that we imitate others to overcome the barriers between us, and in turn learn about the environment around us and about ourselves. Finally, in empathic listening, we co-create reality. The need to understand another's world view and the problems they are experiencing are central to empathic listening, and central to our understanding of effective listening in civic situations.

Ethical Listening. Beard (2009) asserts that listening as a skill that is marked on a continuum from poor to good has been mapped and studied thoroughly. What has not been studied, however, is the question of ethical listening. As ethics is a key component

of participatory democracy (Hogan et al., 2008), it needs to be discussed beyond just the speaking realm, and into the listening realm. Beard (2009) argues that there are several choices we can make, as listeners, to make us more "ethical beings" (p. 18). We must have the choice to listen individually; listening alone is *not* anti-communal. If listening individually is a "positive, self-constructive act" then it can help us work on our relationships with others. Second, we make the choice to listen selectively. This relates back to media consumption and literacy; we need to seek out media that will enhance our relationships, not harm them. Third, we make a choice not to listen. His example of when we refuse to listen to Holocaust denier David Irving. Refusing to listen to such harmful lies is an ethical choice. Fourth, we make a choice to listen together. Ideally, then, we do not listen *to* someone, but *with* someone. What we choose to listen to can create community, such as listening together at a community rally. Fifth, we make the choice to listen to each other. Although the other choices have to do with creation of the self, the end result is that we come back to our original purpose in listening, which is to listen to each other.

According to Purdy (1995), ethical listening is about being nonjudgmental. In fact, "not listening" is an ethical decision. Purdy argues that the "only tenable ethical position" is to listen as openly as possible as often as possible (p. 9). This, then, requires empathic listening. Forester (1980) also discusses the implications of not listening on democracy, saying that "listening is political" and if we do not listen our community will cease to exist (p. 230). Purdy notes that the increasing diversity of our culture makes listening especially important—and difficult. We need to be trained to listen to public discourse in such a way that will keep our society bound together. Although it takes a lot

of energy to listen to everything all the time, Purdy argues that we give "100% in listening all the time" (p. 12). To do less is to shortchange ourselves and others.

Purdy (1995) admits that listening empathically and openly would change us, but we need to be open to that change. Instead of going in to a situation ready to judge, we should be ready to listen. Eadie (1990) argues that by listening, we do not have to comply or change or views; we do not have to agree or resign ourselves to another's position simply because we have chosen to listen. Purdy (1995) however, argues that we do indeed risk being changed by listening. "If we truly open ourselves to understanding another person and their position we may find that we have accepted some portion of it, that we have changed. That is a risk we must suffer if we would live in functioning relationships and a working democracy" (p. 14). Ultimately, social breakdown is possible without listening: meanings are not heard, thus people do not understand each other, thus society breaks down (Purdy, 1995). Clearly, open, ethical, empathic listening is important for a thriving democracy, and a skill that must be taught to students.

Summary

This literature reviewed the definition and history of civic engagement in higher education, including the concept of social capital. The decline and resurgence of civic engagement in America was documented. Important concepts that will appear in the implications sections were reviewed: self-regulated learning, media literacy, and listening were all discussed and will prove important to the findings of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

To understand the development of civic engagement in communication students, qualitative methods were used in this study. In-depth interviews were conducted and journals were written to gather the data needed to uncover themes. My epistemology is that of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In this chapter, I will outline my methodology, epistemology, methods, procedures, and the steps I have taken to ensure validity.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methods are notoriously difficult to define. In fact, Potter (1996) devotes an entire chapter of his book to the "potpourri of definitions" that abound for qualitative research. He warns that, for some scholars, "the quest for a definition is useless and even dangerous" (Potter, 1996, p. 6). He is not alone in his desire to avoid defining qualitative methods. Other scholars, however, have attempted to provide definitions to help elucidate just what it means to do qualitative research. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue that "qualitative research in communication involves the performances and practices of human communication" (p. 6). Thus, qualitative researchers observe humans communicating and attempt to find meaning in this activity. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) note, researchers attempt to interpret "phenomena" in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Researchers point to several key elements of qualitative research. According to Creswell (1998), most agree that qualitative research takes place in a natural setting and

that the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers pictures or words and analyzes them inductively. This differs from the more traditional deductive approach to analysis taken by quantitative researchers. Creswell points to distinct methodological traditions in qualitative research. These traditions of inquiry explore a social or human problem. Creswell also states that there are four reasons one would turn to qualitative methods to conduct their research: first, when the research question starts with a how or a what, as opposed to a why; second, if a topic needs to be explored; third, if a detailed view is warranted; and fourth, when a natural setting is required.

Educational psychologists also point to the usefulness of qualitative research when studying self-regulated learning (SRL). Previous quantitative research treated SRL as an aptitude; the use of qualitative methods allows researchers to understand how students self-regulate *in situ,* meaning in the situation or context needed. De Groot (2002) discusses her use of unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews to understand how students self-regulate. She claims that interviewing has the power to show researchers "how motivational and cognitive components of self-regulated learning interact to produce learning and development" (p. 51-52.)

Likewise, Patrick and Middleton (2002) turn to qualitative interviews as "particularly well-suited" to the task of understanding SRL because of the thick descriptions that reveal what, how, why, and when, the emphasis on context and setting, and because they are "oriented to revealing complexity" (p. 28). Additionally, interviews allow researchers to take an inductive, grounded approach, which is the approach I intend to take.

My proposed study of civic engagement is largely exploratory. It begins with a how: how do students develop the capacity and desire to become civically engaged? Because this topic has not been explored, it is appropriate to qualitative analysis, as I will attempt to gather and describe a larger picture of what is happening. The resulting theory will be inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon, civic engagement development—in that "it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (Potter, 1996, p. 152). This is an iterative process between analysis and data collection, resulting in "descriptive typologies and dynamics models" instead of more formal scientific theories (p. 152). My goal is to create such a model of civic engagement development.

Epistemology

The epistemology that guides my research is grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Grounded theory seeks to do more than explore and describe a phenomenon. Through qualitative interviews and observations, the grounded theory researcher seeks data that can be mined for themes, which in turn can support the creation of theory. As Creswell (1998) defines it, "[T]he intent of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to the particular situation" (p. 56). In my study of communication students, I hope to generate a theory of civic engagement as it relates to media literacy, listening, and self-regulated learning.

Grounded theory seeks to discover a theory that is empirically grounded in research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Rather than merely describe, a theory should enable

us to explain and predict events. Of course, as in any qualitative research, the creation of

the theory, the analysis, is in "the interplay between researchers and data" (p. 13). This

means that the interpretation of the data by the researcher is a factor in the creation of the

theory; the researcher is the instrument of data collection.

There is a standard format for analyzing data in grounded theory. The first step is

known as *open coding*, in which initial categories begin to emerge from the data. After

open coding, the next step is *axial coding,* in which the data is assembled into a coding

matrix. The researcher finds the central phenomenon and explores the causal conditions

between phenomenon.   Finally, in *selective coding*, the researcher "writes a story" and

presents propositions (hypotheses) (Creswell, 1998, p. 57; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Interviewing

This study will employ in-depth interviewing to collect data. The purpose of in-

depth interviews is to attempt to understand another's experience. As Seidman (2006)

points out:

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test
>
> hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used. At the root of in-
>
> depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other
>
> people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 9)

My goal in this research is to understand how people become civically engaged; the best

way to understand what they consider their methods and processes is to ask them to relay

this to me in in-depth interviews.

One of the reasons to conduct interviews is to "gather information about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 174). Certainly, one cannot observe the process of developing civic engagement, so exploring the concepts necessary to this process with the students is the best method.

One of the goals of qualitative interviewing is to create an equitable relationship with the interviewee. In fact, a "sense of empowerment for the participant" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002) should be sought. The researcher thus needs to frame the interview as an equal partnership, a conversation in which the researcher and participant "work as partners toward a common goal" (p. 184). I did this by setting up times and places that were comfortable and convenient for the interviewee, and by fully disclosing the purposes of the interview.

Rapport is another key component of the qualitative interview. Rapport must be established rather quickly (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 189) because interviews are generally limited in time. Rapport building begins with the researcher clearly stating their purpose; no deception should be used. Interviewer self-disclosures are another way to gain rapport, but must be balanced against the desire to "lead" the participant. However, relating, for example, personal reasons for conducting the research might open the channels of communication between the researcher and interviewee.

In-depth interviewing is particularly useful for eliciting knowledge from experts, and these students are experts on their own civic engagement. Wood and Ford (1993) recommend a four phase structure for interviewing with experts. In the first phase, descriptive elicitation, the goal is to document the expert's language, focusing on "native" words, terms, and phrases used by the expert regularly. Often, experts will

attempt to translate to the knowledge engineer, or interviewer, so it is important to use techniques to keep the expert speaking from within their domain. One way to do this is to use "Grand Tour" questions which ask the expert to describe a typical problem-space and solution. Multiple types of "tour" questions, case-focused questions, and native-language questions are detailed by Wood and Ford to assist in the descriptive elicitation stage

The second phase is structured expansion. In this stage, the interviewer "uses questioning techniques that explore the rich, integrated organizational structures of the expert's knowledge" (p. 80). There are several techniques for doing this. First, the interview should use domain terminology in the questions to encourage the interviewee to do the same. Second, longer questions often incite longer answers. Finally, the setting is important to this phase of questioning. The expert should be in the setting in which they normally solve problems. Types of questions used in this phase are grouped into relationship questions and contrast questions. Relationship questions look for cover terms and terms that are included under the cover term. Contrast questions ask for differences in terms and concepts, such as, "Could you explain the difference between X and Y?"

The third phase is scripting in which procedural knowledge is sought. Wood and Ford (1993) note that it is important to conduct in-depth interviews using the first two techniques before moving to this phase, which includes protocol (think-aloud) analysis. Think aloud protocol analysis asks experts to talk about what they are doing as they solve a typical problem. This unfortunately does not work as well for ill-structured domains. Additionally, Hoffman, Shadbolt, Burton, and Klein (1995) note that this process is at

once more time consuming and provides less information and less complete information that other processes. For these two reasons, protocol analysis will not be used in the present study.

The fourth step is validation, which includes check and controls throughout the interview process. One kind of check is looking for new cases and even negative cases—those that do not fit with what other experts have said. This process helps avoid verification bias (looking for confirming cases only). Controls and checks should be used throughout the interview, however, in the form of validation questions. Native language questions, semantic relationship questions, and contrast questions are all kinds of questions to use when eliciting knowledge from an expert.

Case Study Methodology

Case studies are popular in education research. Although they can be quantitative in nature, most education case studies are qualitative because of their interest in processes, contexts and discovery as opposed to outcomes, variables and confirmation of theories (Merriam, 1998). Case studies involve "intensive descriptions" and analysis of single units, and in this study, six students were selected and intensive descriptions were written. These six students form the "unit" that was studied, and these six students form a "bounded system" in which only a certain phenomena about these students was studied (Smith, 1978). In fact, if the study is not bounded, it is not suited for a case study.

Case studies should be particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a single phenomenon, such as the phenomenon of civic engagement in six selected students. To be particularistic, case studies often "examine a

specific instance but illuminate a general problem" (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). In this case, specific students are examined to highlight the issues with civic engagement characteristics in communication students. Descriptive means case studies should use thick description that is the "complete, literal description" of the individuals being studied (p. 29). This study is exploratory, as many case studies are. It highlights the complexities of the situation. Finally, heuristic means that case studies shed light on new meanings of the phenomenon being studied. It explains the reasons for a problem or the background of a situation.

Merriam (1998) also lays out four key ways case study knowledge is unique. First, it is more concrete and resonates with our own experience because of the vivid description. Second, it is contextual, meaning the experiences are described in context and not abstract, as in, for example, quantitative research designs. Third, it is developed by reader interpretation. When new data is added to old data, these interpretations can change. Fourth, it is based on "reference populations determined by the reader" (p. 32).

Yin (2003) argues that studies whose questions focus on the "why" and "how" naturally lend themselves to case study methodology. These are more exploratory questions suited for a more exploratory approach. This study asks how and why students develop or do not develop civic engagement proclivities during a communication course. It sought to explore how students thought about the phenomena and how they acted on their new-found knowledge, if at all. Additionally, Yin points out that in case studies, behavior cannot be controlled. If controlling behavior is not essential to the study, a case study method might be appropriate. This study did not seek to control students' behavior, but rather to describe it.

Participants and Procedures

    Participants. To conduct this qualitative case study, I recruited six students who were enrolled in the argumentation and debate class in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. This course was chosen because of its natural affinity with civic and politically engaged topics.

    Recruitment. Consent was obtained from the instructor of one section of argumentation and debate to come into the class and recruit. Students were told about the project and asked if they would participate in interviews and journaling in exchange for 1 upper-level communication credit and extra credit in that class. Interested students were to contact me by email. Once I heard from an interested student, I asked them several questions by email, to assess their current levels civic engagement. I then chose six students who were somewhat to highly civically engaged and asked them to meet me for an interview.

    Procedures. At the start of every interview, the participant was given a copy of the informed consent form. I went over the form with them and explained that their responses are confidential, that no names will be used, that they can choose their own pseudonym (which they all declined to do), and that they could decline to participate at any time without penalty. Each interview took approximately 45-60 minutes.

    Students were also asked at this time to keep a journal of their experience in their debate class and to email them to me or hand them to me when we met for a second interview, whatever was most convenient for them. The only specific instructions were

to talk about their debates and the potential connections with their civic and campus activities.

Interview Guide. Interview guides should be flexible, iterative, and continuous (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In other words, the interview schedule should not be locked in stone, but should be flexible enough to change as the interviews progress and new information is discovered. Questions also need to be flexible enough that they can change within an interview if it is going in an unexpected direction.

My questions relate directly back to my research questions, which seek to understand not only how students develop civic engagement, but also their thoughts on what skills are needed and what they are learning to be more civically engaged. Questions for structured interviews "should cover a broad range of particulars within the domain and be carefully worded so as to avoid suggesting particular answers or imposing the categories or biases of the interviewer" (Hoffman, et al., 1995, p. 135).

I pre-tested the questions on several personal contacts, instructors in the Department of Communication, to help assess the flow of questions and if I was missing anything or if anything was confusing. I strive to see the interview as a "guided conversation" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), in which my conversational partners have control over the flow of the interview nearly as much as I do. Pre-testing the questions helped ensure this guided conversation flowed as planned.

Journal Entries. Each student kept journal entries during the class, particularly during their debates. Analyzing these journal entries added rich descriptions to the data.

Pearson, Child and Kahl (2006) used journal entries in their study of public speaking preparation. This provided me with an excellent example for coding and analyzing these students' journals. Although they coded their journals entries in a quantitative way, they still provided guidance for having students journal as a means of data collection.

Data Analysis

I wrote journal entries after each interview about how the interview went, any emerging themes I noticed, and my technique as an interviewer. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend these reflective remarks as part of one's raw field notes. Reflections such as a new hypothesis, "cross-allusions" to other material, thoughts about my relationship with the interviewee, and elaboration or clarification of prior incidents are all items that might go into one's reflective journals. Such journaling helps the researcher remain reflexive, enhancing the validity of the qualitative research.

As the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and notes were added. As I transcribed, observer comments were added (Miles & Huberman, 1994), noting linkages to other data and emerging themes. Data analysis really began at the transcription stage.

Following the example of Miles and Huberman (1994) and using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), I began searching the transcripts for common themes that the informants tend to all say. This initial step is called open coding. Once the initial themes are in place, axial coding is used to relate themes to one another and to the literature. I developed a system of coding these themes so that I could easily read through the data and find instances of themes.

The major themes and sub-themes then were written up in the results section of this dissertation. Quotes from the interviewers were used to demonstrate the prevalence of themes. All transcripts were revisited to ensure that no themes were left out.

Validity

Validity ensures that one is measuring what they intend to measure (Wolcott, 1994). Creswell (1998) prefers the term "verification" to validity, because it reinforces the notion that qualitative methods are a distinct tradition of research, legitimate in their own right. Both authors offer several suggestions for enhancing validity, and my strategies are outlined below.

Several methods were used to enhance credibility and work toward a greater level of transfer. Triangulation was used to enhance credibility. Triangulation extends this research to a variety of methods (Maxwell, 2005, p. 132). Using both interviews and journals, as well as email follow-ups with the students, ensured validity.

Finding, or searching for, discrepant cases also can enhance credibility (Maxwell, 2005). By examining both sides of the problem, and making that examination apparent in the reporting, I am certain that I conducted a thorough study to discover all possible sides. By checking with my participants, I also ensured that I did not put words into their mouths and report something that was not actually there. It is important to use what Cresswell (1998) describes as the process of negative case analysis, in which the researcher revises hypotheses as negative cases are explored, until all cases "fit."

Finally, external audits were employed. In external audits, someone with no connection to the study reviews the transcripts and data and assesses the accuracy of the

researchers interpretations. These measures, along with rich, thick description, helped to ensure a grounded theory of civic engagement that is credible and transferable. Most importantly, it should be true to the participants' words and accurately report their feelings and experiences and use those experiences to create a grounded theory that will help teachers as they prepare students to become civically engaged citizens.

As described, journals were kept to aid in the process of reflexivity. "Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (Lincoln and Guba, 2003, p. 283). It is how one knows about oneself through the process of research. Reflexivity is important in ensuring validity because it helps the researcher, as much as possible, separate herself from the data. It is the process of "bracketing" oneself out of the data as much as possible.

Summary

To conduct a study of civic engagement development in communication students, qualitative methods were employed. Grounded theory was used to identify key themes and develop theory that could guide teachers as they seek to develop civic engagement skills in their students. Participants were selected based on their propensity for civic engagement in their communities and on campus and were interviewed and kept journals about their engagement and its relationship to their communication class. Interviews and journals were coded based on the methods of grounded theory, including open, axial, and selective coding. To ensure that the participants' thoughts and feelings were truthfully represented, reflexive journaling was used, as were member checks and external audits.

Following is an analysis and detailed case studies of the interviews and journals of these

six students.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This grounded theory study was conducted to understand how students developed or improved their civic engagement desires and skills during the course of an upper-level communication class. Data collection was completed through structured interviews and open-ended journals with member checks used for additional validity. The first three chapters introduced this set of case studies, reviewed the literature relevant to civic engagement, listening and media literacy, and explained the methods used to gather and analyze the data. What follows are detailed stories about each students' experience with civic engagement and their communication classes and analysis of the themes discovered in their reports in answer to the following research questions:

1. What do communication students think it means to be civically engaged?

2. How does an upper-level communication course contribute to the development of civic engagement in college students?

3. What skills do students consider most important in being civically engaged?

4. How do students perceive that public speaking and debate are related to civic engagement?

Participants

The study research sample included six students in an upper-level communication course in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. Students had a variety of majors, from communication and criminology to government and politics to biology to engineering. Students ranged in age from 18-22. They were juniors and

seniors at the University. These students were chosen because they had experience being civically engaged at the college level. Their experiences are described in detail.

Data Collection Process

The researcher began by meeting with one of the instructors of argumentation and debate and requesting a time to come to her class to recruit students. The entire class was informed about the project and its details during one of their class meetings. Students were asked to email if they were interested in participating, and in exchange would receive course credit and extra credit in this class. Once students emailed the researcher, they were asked about their civic engagement and six of the most engaged students were chosen.

Data collection began with the initial interview. Students talked about what they did to be civically engaged and what they studied, and journals were assigned. A meeting was then scheduled for a longer interview. Students were very forthcoming with information and were seemingly pleased to be a part of the interview. Journals were collected and added to the transcripts as data. Students also were contacted by email to ask further questions as needed.

Data Analysis

After collecting and transcribing the interviews and collecting the journals, the researcher began "a qualitative method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory" (Strauss & Corbing, 1990, p. 24). Students were given pseudonyms. They were given the option of choosing their own

pseudonym and no one elected to. During the analysis stage, codes were assigned as

themes emerged and data was repeatedly reviewed. The following themes initially

emerged:

1. Listening

2. Americans civic engagement proclivities

3. Community as definition

4. Obama

5. Translation of Skills

6. Friends

7. Confidence

8. Media and technology

9. Audience

Next, the researcher used axial coding to review emerging themes and continued

to review the data for new themes. Axial coding was then used to integrate the categories

into themes. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding is the process of

relating themes to their subthemes, linking categories together. Finally, selective coding

is used to integrate and refine the theory.

Findings

Brandon: Future Civic Leader. Brandon is an interesting student. When it

comes to the topic of civic engagement, he is effusive and enthusiastic. As a member of

the University of Maryland's living and learning program CIVICUS, he has a unique take

on what it means to be civically engaged. For Brandon, civic engagement goes beyond

community service. Drawing on his reading of Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone*, he believes that today one needs to be a leader in the community; it is no longer enough just to be a part of the community by "simply" participating in community-based activities. Still, he acknowledges that "when you're talking about just helping people around in the city or on your street, your effect can be huge, and when we get people together doing enough of that the snowball effect of that will really be impossible to stop, will be hugely beneficial to society. So it's all about trying to get it on a small level rally trying to get involved in that regard."

Brandon is well-poised to be a leader. As a member of CIVICUS, he is being inundated with community service. He is required to participate in a minimum of four community service projects, such as blood drives and park clean-ups. He also takes classes such as Introduction to Contemporary Social Problems and Leadership in a Multicultural Society. Additionally, students live in the same residence hall on campus (www.civicus.umd.edu).

As a Government and Politics major, he has dreams of working for a senator or congressperson someday, and in fact served his Representative from Los Angeles as an intern over the summer. He was also a member of the Student Government Association for a year, and gained some insights into the political process. In his words, "It was kind of hard to make a decision [regarding the proposed Metro Purple Line], but that's kind of how the government process goes."

As a high school debater, Brandon was not entirely new to the concepts of debate and argumentation when he entered the class, but he stated that he learned new things nonetheless, such as how to debate on a more individual level. He also learned that

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preparation and sourcing are key to a successful debate, because, as he says, you're only as successful as your best source.

Brandon's perspective is that Americans have become less civically engaged, in part because they see studies and reports that make them perceive that their vote doesn't count. He says, "I feel like people look at the big numbers and say, 'Well, I can't really have an effect because I don't have a chance of changing the vote,' or, I mean, 'This national organization, sure what do they really need another person or another 20 dollar donation, not really, I'm sure it's not going to make a difference in the long run.' But on the small level it really does and I think that's where civic engagement needs to head next in order to get more emphasis on it."

According to Lopez and Kiesa (2009), there is a strong perception that college students are not engaged civically and politically. Brandon challenged this view: "Because people say that 'Oh, we really don't care about anything and we're cynical about everything.' But I saw something different in my experience and I was really happy to see that there are people that want to help the community." Brandon is a personal reminder that college students are becoming more engaged.

Brandon discussed the importance of listening, which is key to ethical civic participation. He notes, "Even if you're 100% sure that your policy is right, you have to hear the other side, you have to hear what they have to say. And I definitely think that's going to be something important. They really just go ahead and say 'You're crazy, you're wrong, it's just wrong because it is.' I definitely think that patience and listening to your opponent's arguments are going to be very important." He also discussed the importance of understanding one's audience.

Brandon does not think public speaking is more or less important today than it was 100 years ago, but he discusses how it has changed. He says that today with the Internet, Americans are hearing more sound bites and snippets and no one really watches lengthy speeches anymore. Brandon thinks that the media are only partly to blame; he thinks Americans are demanding more information more quickly and the media are accommodating that. Additionally, though, new media like YouTube and Facebook are impacting things. But whether it is for the better or worse, he is not sure.

When asked what speakers or speeches have historically been important, Brandon went immediately to Franklin D. Roosevelt. He also mentions Lincoln, and, finally, President Obama. But he reiterates that "public speaking and civic engagement are intertwined," that the "good speakers" talk about a need to help humanity and move forward, and to "change the status quo for the better." Although President Obama is new on the scene, Brandon likes what he hears so far and believes President Obama has the power to make change with his public speeches.

When it comes to debate class, Brandon is clear: it has helped improve some of the skills he will need to continue his life of civic engagement. One thing he is working on is slowing down his speech. Learning how to debate individually and not as a member of a team is another bonus for Brandon. He also thinks that listening to the other students speak has been both inspirational and informative, as he can learn from some of the "best and brightest" students out there. When asked if this class could encourage more civic engagement, however, Brandon lamented that "it's hard for a class to have real world implications not the less to actually have an effect," but what is happening so far—the emphasis on policy—is a good place to start. As we have seen, at Gustavus

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Adophus (Brammer and Wolter, 2008), there can be a class with real world implications, and perhaps this is something we should be striving for.

Sarah: Athletics as Civic Engagement. Sarah would say that the actions and efforts one puts toward their community is civic engagement, and she has an interesting viewpoint. That is because, as a student worker in the athletic department, she helps to advertise sporting events—and this, to her, constitutes civic engagement. This is because it is "reaching out for other people to get involved." Whether or not we agree with Sarah, she has other thoughts on civic engagement as shaped by her experience in the debate class.

Sarah does believe in other causes, such as a woman's right to choose and the environmental movement. In fact, she recently joined an environmental activist group which goes door to door informing people about climate change, although she has not done this yet. Although she has gone to pro-choice rallies and marches, she admits she is not very civically engaged in this area. However, she learned about the possibilities of a nuclear attack on Iran for her first debate, and this became a subject of interest to her. She does not know if this is civically engaging, but she's "told a lot of people about it, to get them informed and let them know that this could be a potential issue in the next few years." This seems to be a trend in modern college students; that talking to other students, and not traditional public speaking, is a form of civic engagement.

Sarah says the most important thing she has learned in her debate class, related to civic engagement, is making arguments. She learned how to "back up" her arguments and her points so that when she is debating with someone in the real world, on being pro-

choice, for example, she knows what kind of arguments to use. She says, "It was kind of like, not even about the grade, it was, but just telling people about what's going on." Once again, we see that her concept of civic engagement, as we will see with other students, is that telling other people is one kind of engagement, perhaps the most important, or at least the easiest.

When asked if America has become more or less civically engaged, Sarah admits she is not sure. However, she notes that, as many other students also note, President Obama seems to inspire people to become more engaged. She also thinks that there is a definite surge in the number of people who are involved in environmental causes, at least on a small scale. She says that on campus there is "always something going on about the environment." She also mentions the economy.

Like Brandon, Sarah thinks that listening will be one of the most important skills for the 21st century communicator. She claims, "If you don't listen to what other people are saying, you'll have no idea what you're talking about." Public speaking in general is another key trait communicators must possess. If one cannot get up in front of a crowd and speak, one has no hope of convincing an audience to listen to and agree with their arguments. Sarah also notes that to be a responsible citizen-speaker, one needs to be a leader and have confidence. She thinks that confidence is a "main point" because no one will listen to you if there is no passion and confidence.

Sarah also agrees that mass media have changed the way we give speeches, and she argues that it is for the better, because it is more possible for more people to hear them. One thing she learned in her debate class was that before mass media, the presidents would only talk to Congress and their close cabinet members. With the advent

of television and radio, "people could actually see and hear their president talking to them, that they're trying to help." She admits that sometimes the media can skew things, but overall they help spread news, and that is a positive development.

Finally, Sarah does believe that debate class has helped her become more civically engaged. She says it has taught her how to make arguments and make points; she has already taken this back to the athletic department. She also has learned about fighting against the status quo, and this, in addition to practicing in front of her peers, has given her that confidence that she talks about needing to be an effective speaker and being engaged. She notes, "I think that confidence is a really big thing," and fortunately, this class, as well as her experience with Communication 107 (the introductory basic course at the University of Maryland), have given her the confidence she needs to engage.

Sherry: "Communication courses do not make me civically engaged" As president of the Caribbean Students Association at the University of Maryland, Sherry is involved in many campus and local activities, including tutoring young kids in the Langley Park area and on campus. Her responsibilities as president include making sure everyone knows about the group and organizing fun and educational events. However, when asked about her passions, Sherry goes to the music industry and helping Reggae artists from the Caribbean get signed to major labels. Civic engagement? Even she is not sure.

In this debate class, Sherry learned about the issue of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st state, and was shocked to learn that most Puerto Ricans are not in favor of this. Her

research led her to articles about how people believe that the U.S. will try to take away Puerto Rico's culture and language, and she would "feel bad" if somebody wanted her to change her language. She became interested in this topic and in all the U.S. territories, as the daughter of immigrants herself, and it reminds her of "Britain and France in the old days." However, she admits she would never become actively involved in the issue outside of class.

At the time we spoke, Sherry was preparing for her next debate, in which she was arguing that girls under 16 should not have to have a parent's consent to get an abortion. This also became something she was interested in and did believe in the side she set out to research. However, she also said this was something she would not take action on because she was "not personally affected" nor has she known anybody who has had that problem. She is more interested in topics that have a personal affect on her, which includes music and possibly working with kids, such as after school programs and tutoring.

Although she admits that she has learned some skills that could help her civic engagement in this debate class, such as group work and management skills, Sherry says the debate skills she has learned have *not* impacted her desire to be civically engaged. She has "always had the desire, so I guess it just opens up new stuff to me, but it doesn't really push me to do more." Unlike Sarah and Brandon, Sarah does not perceive that this course enhanced her civic engagement abilities or desire. When asked why she thinks she is engaged in the ways that she is, Sherry answers that her "friends have a lot to do with it." Her communication classes, she says, have perhaps helped her continue, and

given her confidence (something Sarah also mentions) but have not created a civically engaged student.

Sherry does think that Americans have become more civically engaged lately, and she credits the environmental movement with that, much like Sarah did. She does think that in modern times, being electronically savvy is a skill that is needed to be civically engaged. In fact, her group uses Facebook to recruit students to tutor for America Reads and America Counts. Because of this, she thinks that public speaking is losing its relevance, but that it is still somewhat important.

Like Brandon and Sarah, Sherry acknowledges that mass media have completely altered the way speeches are given. "As soon as you deliver a speech you have all these channels that are dissecting what you said and trying to spin [it]," she notes. When asked what it takes, then, to be a responsible speaker these days, Sherry moves away from media and into the policy realm. She also notes one would have to understand audience, which is a key tenet of public speaking education. Sherry seems to have learned a lot, but does not agree that her communication courses have influenced her civic engagement. She says she would still tutor and be involved on campus without any of these courses.

Grace: "I'm not as engaged as I could be" Grace is active in the Office of Multi-ethnic Student Education (OMSE) Academic Excellence Society (OAES), a program for talented multi-ethnic students to gain additional professional, academic, and personal development opportunities. Through this program, she tutors freshman boys from a nearby high school every Saturday morning. She does consider herself civically engaged, though "not as much as I should be I guess." She notes that it is "kind of difficult to do

that with school and all these other priorities." She is also involved in the College Park Law Society, so despite her responsibilities, she remains fairly active on campus.

With the College Park Law Society, Grace gets into some lively debates. Recently the group talked about environmental awareness on campus. However, when asked what they do after the discussion, she says, "I guess that's the part where we kind of fail; I wish we could do more. And I guess I'm not exactly sure what exactly we could do except encourage students, there's not really a way of keeping track if students are doing what they're saying." So, sadly, it is just the fellow College Park Law Society students who are the audience for their lively debates.

Interestingly, Grace's first speech in the debate class was about getting students more civically engaged and globally aware by taking emerging issues classes. She believes that people today are definitely less civically engaged, and she talks about the 1960s as an example of a time when people were engaged because the U.S. was involved in a war. Then she adds, "if you think about it, we're in a war today and the economy's dying out, and there's a lot of stuff going on that should impact our involvement. This might be a stretch, but I think out generation has kind of grown into a more apathetic generation." Her solution of global and emerging issues courses is borrowed from the University of Pennsylvania's curriculum, and to her knowledge, the University of Maryland does not offer similar courses.

When it comes to this communication course, her feelings are mixed. She admits that nothing she has researched will inspire her to be more civically engaged. But, she has learned skills that could help her take action. She learned a bit about public speaking and debate, such as gathering her thoughts and speaking " on a whim." Although she is an

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engineering major, she is minoring in rhetoric because she is considering law school as a future career path.

Jaime: Sorority Life as Engagement. Jaime was part of the interdisciplinary living and learning program, Beyond the Classroom (BTC), whose mission is to teach students about civic engagement. BTC has students explore social and civic issues of the most importance to them. Jaime did her paper and presentation on the HIV/AIDS epidemic that is occurring in the DC area. Jaime did not have much to say about this program, however, but instead focused her discussion on her work in her sorority. As a member of her sorority, she has learned about the crisis in Darfur, and has raised money for a girls' school in Nigeria. Key to Jaime is that she passes this information on to her friends and shares with her friends on other campuses. Jaime is passionate about several current topics, including the HIV/AIDS epidemic, education, global warming and even the H1N1 flu, and she talks to her friends about all these issues, and brings certain issues to her sorority to talk about in public forums.

Before her recent debate, Jaime was unaware of the issue of underage girls needing consent from their parents to have an abortion. She was assigned to argue for consent, and through her research became a believer in this side of the issue. She also knows friends under the age of 17 who have had children, so her personal experience bears on her opinion of this topic. She says she would consider bringing this issue to her sorority because "what's more appropriate than women teaching women" about this kind of information and we need to "help each other."

One of the benefits Jaime has gotten out of this debate class is the opportunity to hear other students speak on topics she has never heard of. This enables her to talk to her friends about these new topics. Importantly, Jaime also believes that her debate and public speaking training have helped her gain confidence, a theme Sarah talks about in detail. In order to gain this confidence and be a good public speaker, one needs practice, which includes both watching other people and taking classes, such as those offered in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. She notes that she did well in Communication 107 and that it helped her public speaking skills as well.

Jaime's perspective on whether or not Americans have become more or less civically engaged is that it depends on the individual. She sees certain groups getting involved and advocating causes, but she thinks that it is more the major figures in entertainment and politics who are getting involved and trying to advocate their causes to the public. She thinks people look up to actors and entertainers and athletes and these figures are helping people become more civically engaged.

Jaime says that listening is the most important skill for communicators in the 21st century. She argues that it helps "further your cause" if you can listen to others and respond to what they are saying. Like Sarah and Brandon, Jaime thinks that public speaking has changed with the changing technology, but believes that this technology makes public speaking more important. With technology "you can reach the masses, you can download speeches on iPod." The media also have made it possible to challenge and change debates the next morning because the media can twist what people are saying.

President Obama comes first to Jaime's mind when asked about historic speakers, as does John F. Kennedy, in part because she just studied them in her debate class. She believes both presidents used the changing media to their advantage.

To Jaime, this debate class has helped her see different sides and learn different current events and this has helped her become a better citizen. She believes that this debate class is doing an effective job at encouraging civic engagement because it is "teaching [them] different things." She thinks she has become more civically engaged than in Communication 107 because of the topics that were brought to her attention in this class, and in Communication 107, students pick their own topics, which could range from cookies to cats.

Thomas: A scientist with an interest in politics. Thomas has an interesting perspective in his definition of civic engagement, because he believes that it does not have to be voluntary. In other words, government workers who are getting paid to do what they do are still civically engaged. Thomas himself does not work for the government, but he does plenty of volunteer work in his community through his fraternity, which is a pre-medical sciences organization.

Although Thomas was passionate about his first topic, legalizing funds for stem cell research, President Obama had already signed the stimulus package that did indeed free up these funds, so there was nothing else for Thomas left to do to advocate his stance. He adds, though, that "If I felt like it needed to be talked about, locally, civically, politically, then I would definitely be will to." As a pre-medical student, this is clearly a topic of interest for Thomas and could be a potential topic of engagement.

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Thomas argued in favor of a mandatory community service requirement for university students as his first debate. After doing the research, he agrees that it is a good idea and became "very passionate" about it. However, he is not sure about taking this to the public, because it is not clear where to start. When asked if he would take this idea to the larger campus community, Thomas replied, "Yeah, possibly. If I had, I guess it's not always easy to know how you can. I mean we have a student government and we have all this stuff, but you're not really sure whether the student government would even be able to do anything about it. So you're not sure if you should take it to the administration or the SGA or what organization has the ability to help you." This reflects several other students' comments on their confusion over where and how to start taking their ideas into the public arena.

The skills he has learned in this argumentation and debate class have definitely helped Thomas already. He recently won the office of vice-president in his fraternity and credits his public speaking experience with helping him make an effective campaign speech. Now, he says, he is in a position to engage the entire fraternity civically in projects.

Like Brandon, Thomas sees leadership as a key component of civic engagement. On the other hand, he admits, one can be civically engaged with "just kind of …helping people out and not being a leader," but public speaking and debate are for people who are "trying to steer things, trying to lead." The concept of being a leader is one of the themes that emerged from the students.

Thomas would say that in recent years Americans have become more civically engaged because of the Internet, including blogs and YouTube. He says he is "barraged

by more people's opinions" so that is how he gauges his perception of "more engaged." Sadly, a lot of what people are civically engaged about, he says, is "fashionable" and topics that are hot right now. He notes, "People are just going to talk about whatever's on the news."

Although Thomas is able to list several organizations that students might join to be civically engaged, such as the SGA and community service organizations, he says one must do a little bit of searching to get involved. This is a telling comment, because the University of Maryland is home to the Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership (CCEL), also called TerpImpact. None of the respondents mentioned this group when asked about civic engagement opportunities at UMD. This begs the question, what could TerpImpact do to be better known throughout the community?

In Thomas's opinion, persuasiveness is key. One aspect that makes someone persuasive is "correctness" of communicating. In other words, spelling mistakes can break someone's attempt at persuasion. Being able to project is a factor that this soft-spoken young man discusses. He thinks his soft-spoken voice might make him sound less enthusiastic, passionate, or persuasive. "These are the kinds of things we can fix, though," he adds.

Public speaking has neither gained nor lost importance in the last 100 years, but it is different. Different skills need to be employed these days, and, sadly, "you just have to have more money to speak well, but money was important 100 years ago too." Although he mentions Hitler as an important figure in historical public address, he also goes to President Obama immediately, saying, "It's gonna be history one day."

Audience was something that Thomas was reminded of when asked about the way media have altered public speaking and delivery of speeches. Now, he notes, speeches are broadcast everywhere, so politicians must alter their message for a broader audience. "It doesn't really matter if you're going to Ohio or Michigan to talk to the auto makers because the people in south Florida are going to hear the same speech and the people in California are going to hear the same speech. So they have to tailor their speeches now to address everything because it's going to get everywhere." So how, then, can politicians tailor these speeches to persuade everyone?

So did the debate class make Thomas more civically engaged? He says he thinks it could help, if you are already trying to do something in your community, but the class itself does not really engage you with the community, only with classmates. He notes that it would "be interesting" to go out and engage the community, but is not sure how that would be graded.

Themes

Several key themes emerged from the students' interviews. Several students mentioned the importance of listening, but did not explore the ethics of listening. There were mixed views of whether or not Americans are more or less civically engaged today. All of their definitions of civic engagement included community, but no one really mentioned national or global work. The University of Maryland's own TerpImpact (CCEL) was noticeably missing from every interview. When asked for historical examples, nearly every student talked about President Obama. Students do not know how to translate their skills into the public arena, to actually become civically engaged.

Confidence is listed a key component of engagement. Media and technology were discussed and there are some literacy issues. And finally, audience was discussed, and is an important component of public speaking preparation.

Listening. Listening is an ethical act. "Listening well—attentively, actively, respectfully, and critically—is not only an essential part of effective communication but an important responsibility of citizenship in a democracy" (Hogan et al., 2008, p. 79). Several students mentioned the importance of listening, but it is unclear if they are discussing it as an ethical act. When asked what is the most important skill for a twenty-first-century citizen speaker, Sarah replied:

> Definitely I'd say listening, because if you don't listen to what other people are saying, you'll have no idea what you're talking about. So I think it's really important to be a good listener.

What is fascinating about Sarah's comment is that she focuses on being able to respond, which is certainly an aspect of critical listening, but not perhaps of ethical listening (Purdy, 1995). Brandon also focuses on listening:

> I think that one that's going to be very important is patience. Even if you're 100% sure that your policy is right, you have to hear the other side, you have to hear what they have to say. And I definitely think that's going to be something important.

When asked, then, about listening to opponents, Brandon responded, " [We are] in dire straits…It's become more about sound bites, and when people are interviewed a lot more

about screaming and that doesn't help the debate that must makes it a fight, a two-sided fight between two people."

Brandon emphasizes, "And once again, I want to emphasize that a good public speaker listens to his audience." Brandon uses the skills Purdy (1995) defines as ethical listening. Being open to change and being open to listening with empathy are two keys of ethical listening.

Mixed views on Americans becoming more/less civically engaged. Putnam (2000) wrote an entire book dedicated to the proposition that Americans were becoming less civically engaged in their communities, in politics, even in religion. Some newer research would indicate that college students are becoming more engaged (Lopez and Kiesa, 2009). Trends in voting are on the increase for college students. The reality is that perceptions differ for different students, and each student in this study had a different opinion on whether or not Americans are becoming more or less civically engaged. Thomas said:

> In recent years I would actually say more [civically engaged]. Because it's a little bit easier for people to have a voice if they need it, with how the Internet is, with blogs, with posting every single YouTube video, making any kind of video on YouTube you could imagine. I guess I'm just gauging this on the fact that I'm hearing more people's opinions. I'm barraged by more people's opinions so I'm guessing people have more of an ability to speak out.

Grace had a different view, based on her speech about the need for students to take global issues courses. She notes, "Well I pretty much went into how students aren't that

globally aware anymore…if you compare that [1960s] to now, you see the statistics about how Americans can't point out another country in the world." This, to her, indicated that Americans were less civically engaged.

Sherry thinks that the environmental movement has made Americans more engaged. She says, in response to the question, "I think more. I think the whole environmental push, it's really fascinating me because before you never heard anything about being environmentally friendly and people are really concerned, even mainstream, even supermarkets give you bags that you can reuse, and I think people are really taking a stand because they feel that the environment is going to waste."

Sarah is not sure, but agrees that the environmental movement is playing a role:

I don't know, it's hard to say because I guess I really haven't noticed a change. I've been to a few pro-choice rallies the last few years and there's always a huge number of people there. I mean my friends and family I would say are actively civically engaged, but I don't know, I mean, I guess like now [with] Obama there's a rising and like more for the better, you know, getting out what they have to say, I guess I'd say more. (How?) Definitely I would say the environment. Also the economy, a lot of people are without jobs. .. it's more small scale that I've seen.

Brandon disagrees. He would see, despite a few recent changes, that Americans have become less engaged. He adds, "I would say less. Especially, now the 2008 election is obviously a step in the right direction. Not because of any political preferences, but only because of the fact that it really started to get young people engaged. And I really hope to see that in the future."

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Definition: Community, but not Politics. On the surface, the students' definitions of civic engagement are great; they talk about helping the community by volunteering and tutoring. The problem, at least according to some scholar, is that this is not *political* engagement (Colby et al., 2007). Their definitions are as follows:

> Grace: So I think civic engagement is being active in the community, and doing things that further not only your community but the communities that surround you, so things like volunteering, tutoring, or just being outspoken about certain issues.

Like Grace, Jaime also mentions voicing one's opinion:

> I think being civically engaged deals with those who are able to participate in situations that directly affect their communities. Getting involved and voicing your opinions about things that are happening.

Thomas' view is slightly different, in that he believes engagement does not need to be voluntary:

> I think to be civically engaged [means to be] contributing to the community in some way, whether that's locally or even on a bigger scale. I don't think it necessarily has to mean anywhere that you live, it could be a different community than where you're from. I also don't think it has to be voluntary. You could be civically engaged in your government but it would be your job, so you'd be getting paid for it.

Sherry's view of civic engagement seems to be more along the lines of service learning, which is one key part of engagement:

Civic engagement is interacting in your community, whether it's in a group or by

yourself and it's basically helping people you normally would not help.

President Obama as Historic. Hogan et al. (2008) describe the rhetorical

tradition, and note that one of the key components of the rhetorical tradition is learning

from past speakers. These students were asked about past speakers, and interestingly,

many of them came up with our current president, Barack Obama. The first person in

Sarah's mind was Obama:

Like Obama, he's coming in, and the first black president and everyone loves

him, I think that's really historic. It's like recent historic, but we'll be for a long

time…his speeches just like historic speeches just saying, you know, it's time for

a change, it's not all about the old white male anymore in America, there's a lot

more people.

Brandon notes that it is early, but the second person he came up with, after Franklin D.

Roosevelt, was Obama, saying, "I guess recently, I like, although it's way too early to

talk about this, but I like what I hear from Obama. And I really do like that he talks about

the community, the whole 'Yes we can' trying to get the group involved, feeling that

people really can make a difference. I think that's been a very, very good strategy for him

and people kind of dropped that cynicism for at least a the time being and said, 'Ok

maybe we can do something.'"

Finally, Thomas also mentions Obama immediately, "I mean, it's going to be

history one day, but Obama certainly changed things."

Translation of Skills into Public Arena. Students talked extensively about how they wanted to be more engaged, but were unaware of how to translate those skills into the public arena. When asked about the College Park Law Society's engagement with the community, Grace said:

> I guess that's the part where we kind of fail, I wish we could do more. And I guess I'm not exactly sure what exactly we could do except encourage students, there's not really a way of keeping track if students are doing what they are saying.

It seems that to Grace, keeping students accountable is an important part of engagement. She talked about how this group tries to promote, for example, recycling on campus, but since she cannot assess their efforts, she does not see it as civically engaged. When asked about her own personal commitments, and if she was engaged, Grace was also unsure of what to do, saying, "I guess as much as I can do, but honestly I wouldn't even know how to go about doing it."

Thomas did his first speech on making service learning a requirement to graduate at the university. When asked if he would take this issue public, and try to fight for it, he replied:

> Um, yeah, possibly. If I had, I guess it's not always easy to know how you can. I mean we have a student government and we have all this stuff, but you're not really sure whether the student government would even be able to do anything about it. So you're not sure if you should take it to the administration or the SGA or what organization has the ability to help you.

This begs the question, how can we teach students to take their concerns and issues to the public? If students are learning the skills and knowledge but have no avenues for change, then civic education is useless. Colby et al. (2003) note that "Education is not complete until students not only have acquired knowledge but can act on that knowledge in the world" (p. 7). Some students described how talking to others was their only form of engagement. Sarah said, "I mean, I don't know if it's civically engaging, but I've told a lot of people about it, to get them informed." Colby et al. (2003) would say that talking to other about politics and social issues is a form of engagement, although there are certainly other forms that need to be employed, as well. Jaime's primary concern was talking with her friends, and she mentioned it several times. When asked about her first debate topic, and if she would act on it, she said:

> Well, at first it was something that I had to do and unfortunately it was a topic that arose after the election so I couldn't talk more about that with my friends, because I always want to talk with other people, 'Oh did you know I talked about this in class,' me and my friends always do that, so that's something I could have promoted more during the semester.

This research would indicate that a modern form of civic engagement is talking to friends, and that public speaking is perhaps less important than previously thought.

Confidence. In addition to listening, one of the key skills students mentioned needing was confidence. This finding is unique to this study. Of all the skills mentioned in various books and articles, no one (to this researcher's knowledge) has mentioned confidence as a skill or aptitude. Certainly, this is a trait that can be learned and

enhanced through public speaking and debate (communication) training. Brammer and Wolter (2008) do mention that students felt more confident in their public speaking abilities after their public discourse class, but do not discuss the importance of this to being civically engaged. Sarah is adamant about this point. When asked what it takes for a person to be civically engaged, she states, "They have to really be a leader. They have to be confident. I think confidence is a main point. If you're not confident then you're up there like, 'Oh my gosh,' then no one's going to listen to your points because [if] you don't feel passionately about them, no one else will."

Touching on the importance of public speaking skills and communication training, Jaime also notes, "So I think that if you have a strong background in public speaking you have more confidence, more able to reach out to individuals of all ages, on different campuses."

Thomas has a slightly different take on confidence. He discusses how appearing to have a lack of confidence can impact someone's ability to persuade:

> Sometimes just being a loud speaker is effective. And that doesn't go as much on the internet. I know for my part I'm particularly soft spoken, or people usually say that when I get up and talk, so I can see how it would make me appear less passionate, less interested, than someone with a bigger voice than I do.

Media and Technology. Every student argued that the media have changed society, but do not seem to have a strong sense of media literacy. Sherry argues that one of the most important skills for the twenty-first-century community is technological ability, saying, "Being electronically savvy [is important]. Especially, we use Facebook a

lot to recruit become to come out for tutoring." She also talks about how mass media have altered the way speeches are given:

> [Mass media] has changed it [the way we deliver speeches] completely. As soon as you deliver a speech you have all these channels that are dissecting what you said and trying to spin and 'You said this,' so it's really changing.

Sarah agrees that mass media have changed things, and she argues that it is an improvement. "Well I think it's changed it for the better, to make it more possible for more people to hear them, through radio, television, the internet, you can get on and watch any speech from any president and it's just helped so much like get points across and help Americans show what they [believe]." She also focuses on how it has helped presidential communication:

> And ever since, I guess the television, radio, people could actually hear and see their president talking to them, that they're trying to help, just the made it so much easier for the public to like learn about what's on the campaign schedule, what the different sides are arguing for, fighting for, what laws are passed. The media, I mean sometimes they can skew things, focus on one thing that's not important, but overall I'd say the mass media have been helping spread news.
>
> Especially in college, people don't have hours to listen; they can get online.

Thomas mentions the way mass media has altered a politician's need to address different audiences: "I think it's altered it a lot…you hear the same address again and again and again throughout a campaign. But it also makes it interesting to see how a politician is able to address so many different audience that don't agree with each other and try to persuade them to the same end."

Audience. In addition to Thomas's discussion of mass media altering the need for politicians to monitor their audience, several students talked about the need to monitor their own audience. Brandon's comment is very similar to what Thomas noted:

> I think that the speaker has to realize the audience that they're talking to. That's the number one thing, and that's obviously not just the people in front of you but when you're talking about television and potential voters that you're trying to gain that's something else you really have to focus on.

Thomas reiterates his point about audience when talking about politicians:

> Because now whenever a politician speaks, when they're running for office, that one speech is broadcast everywhere, so it doesn't really matter if you're going to Ohio or Michigan to talk to the auto makers because the people in South Florida are going to hear the same speech and the people in California are going to hear the same speech. So they have to tailor their speeches now to address everyone because it's going to get everywhere. And it makes it repetitive.

Summary of Findings

One of the most important findings, that has not been discussed many other places, is the importance of listening to being civically engaged. Purdy (1995; 1991) and others (Eadie, 1990) argue that without open listening, and willingness to change, society will fall apart. Most of these students focused on open listening, but a few focused on the ability to retort to their opponent as a key reason to listening.

It is also important to note that students have mixed ideas on whether or not Americans have become more or less civically engaged. Their responses are very mixed

with respect to this question. Although Putnam (2000) and others would argue that Americans are less engaged, newer research (Jacoby et al., 2009; Lopez and Kiesa, 2009; Colby et al., 2003) shows that students are voting more and are more involved in community service activities than ever before. However, the perceptions of what is happening are mixed.

Students' definitions of civic engagement involve the community but do not necessarily mention political action, which as Colby et al. (2007) note is problematic. Most of the students in this study believed that their community service, such as park cleaning and tutoring, counted as engagement. While they may count as civic engagement, they fall short of connecting the students to social problems and political problems. Also noticeable was that the University's own civic engagement center, TerpImact, was completely missing from their reports on how students can get involved in civic activities at Maryland. Perhaps, though, this offers a new definition of civic engagement that does not require political participation.

Although understanding historical speeches is a key component of the rhetorical tradition (Hogan et al., 2008), most students went immediately to President Obama when asked to discuss historical speakers. This is not inherently problematic, and several students also mentioned John F. Kennedy and Brandon discussed his admiration for Franklin D. Roosevelt. But it makes one wonder if students need more education on historical speeches. Also, not a single student knew what was meant by "rhetorical tradition" when asked, despite their time in the debate class.

Several students mentioned not knowing how to translate their skills into the public arena. If one of the goals of higher education, and communication studies in

particular, is to train students in civic and political engagement, this is problematic. Brammer and Wolter (2008) created a class in which students were forced to take their public speaking skills public, and this enhanced their confidence and desire to be civically engaged. Presumably, students also learned ways they could go public, such as letters to the editor, protests, fundraisers, and petitions. Students need to be taught the skills of "going public" in addition to skills such as delivery, organization, argumentation and confidence.

Confidence is a trait that is important, and can perhaps be enhanced by training in communication classes. Several students mentioned the importance of this trait to public speakers and to being engaged in the twenty-first century. Another key skill they mentioned is technology and media training. The importance of media literacy is significant to note here; students talked as if the media were responsible for not only disseminating information but for telling the public what to think. Perhaps critical thinking training (Colby et al., 2003) is something that more communication courses should focus on; clearly, however, media literacy is also key.

Finally, students also mentioned the importance of knowing one's audience, which is a central tenet of public speaking training. They noted that the audience is changing these days with the onset of media, and that as speakers they need to know their audience. This is an encouraging and positive result.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The first two chapters of this study introduced the current literature on civic engagement in higher education and provided the call for further study of engagement in communication classrooms. The third chapter outlined the methods of a qualitative case study. The fourth chapter highlighted the results of the interviews and journals of the selected students. This chapter will summarize the findings and discuss the implications of the research.

Summary of the Study

As Colby et al. (2003) argue, "undergraduate moral and civic education is not an institutional priority at most campuses" but it should be (p. 49). There is currently more of a need than ever to educate students to be civically and politically engaged during their college years. America is more globally interdependent than ever before. Old, unsolved social problems remain as new problems are emerging; there is increasing racial and ethnic diversity; and the current social, economic, and political problems grow more complex. Students need more than knowledge about one subject, more than just basic job skills; they need to see themselves as members of a community who must act for the common good.

Additionally, there is research that indicates that service learning, one aspect of civic engagement, enhances academic performance. Students who engage in college have higher GPAs and do better in their classes (Astin, Sax, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Davila & Mora, 2007). It is important to teach students to transfer their

skills and knowledge to other realms of their life, such as their political and social lives. These "pedagogies of engagement" are gaining in popularity because they teach students to engage while increasing their academic abilities.

Although some scholars (see Putnam, 2000) believe that civic engagement is on the decrease, some studies show that voting and community service, at least, are on the increase (Lopez and Kiesa, 2009; Colby et al., 2003; Colby et al, 2007). Some argue that it is important for students to make political connections, but as explored earlier, not all students believe their voices are heard when they participate in traditional party politics. Rather, service learning and community service seem to be the new face of civic engagement for today's college generation.

Summary of the Research Questions and Findings

This section will outline the four research questions and the answers to each question, as well as discuss the implications of each finding.

What do communication students think it means to be civically engaged?

There has been a decline in the level of engagement of students in politics. Some research is showing that voting levels are rising, and there has been an increase in community service by college students. Unfortunately, to some scholars, these students fail to make connections to a need for change in social and political policy (Colby et al., 2003). For example, they will serve meals at a homeless shelter, but fail to attempt to seek the institutional change that would eliminate the need for shelters in the first place. Or they will clean parks, but fail to take initiative on larger environmental policies. All

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of the students in this study talked about serving their community when asked to define civic engagement. This is an important part of the concept of civic engagement. The students fulfill the civic component of what Colby et al. (2003) define as engagement:

> Partially overlapping these two dimensions of personal integrity and social conscience is a specifically civic component: coming to understand how a community operates, the problems it faces, and the richness of its diversity and also developing a willingness to commit time and energy to enhance community life and work collectively to resolve community concerns." (p. 18)

What the students are missing, however, is the political component. Colby et al. (2003) "define political engagement as including activities intended to influence social and political institutions, beliefs, and practices and to affect processes and policies relating to community welfare, whether that community is local, state, national, or international" (p. 18). One of the students had participated in student government and had interned for his Representative. He discussed the political process and seemed ready to be a part of the political process. The other students were more involved in local volunteer activities, such as tutoring. Some, such as Colby et al. (2003) argue that students need to be taught to make political connections and use their skills to make political and social change. The data from this study challenge this assumption. Still, students reported not knowing how to take action in their communities on issues they might be concerned about, so this is an area that needs to be improved in the classroom.

How does an upper-level communication course contribute to the development of civic engagement in college students? Interestingly, and sadly, a communication course does not necessarily or inherently contribute to the development of civic engagement in these students. Although several of them reported enhanced skills development, one student, Sherry, said explicitly that this course has *not* enhanced her desire to be civically engaged. Instead, she reported that her friends played a big role in encouraging her to be involved with her activities, such as tutoring and running the Caribbean Student Association.

So what can be done in communication and other courses to develop civic engagement? A first step is to teach critical thinking: "Helping students develop the capacity for critical thinking and the habit of using it, teaching them to be open-minded and interested in pursuing ideas, requiring them to back up their claims and expect others to do the same, and encouraging them to be knowledgeable and accustomed to thinking about moral, civic, and political issues will put them in a strong posture to think independently about their positions and commitments" (Colby et al., 2003, p. 17). Public speaking and debate courses naturally teach students to back up claims and think critically, but perhaps the do not encourage them to think about moral, civic and political issues. This is one area where communication teachers could improve.

There are three elements to moral and civic engagement: understanding, motivation, and skills (Colby et al, 2003). Communication courses are ideally situated to develop all three of these elements. The syllabus for the argumentation and debate course, for instance, states that its objectives include:

- To identify, and clearly and concisely state, a claim and to generate support for the claim thus stated.

- To transform the substance of a dispute into a proposition or a statement of issue.

- To identify basic forms of argument in discourse, and use the forms to generate arguments to support a claim.

- To refute arguments. To follow arguments, identify assumptions in the arguments, and formulate positions in response.

- To be able to place a claim into the context of the arguments of others. This includes particularly the ability to use the library for research.

- To organize claims into a clear, well organized, coherent case.

- To present arguments in a concise, effective oral presentation.

- To be an effective critic of the argument of others. To discriminate good from bad arguments. To discern weaknesses in arguments.

- To formulate a foundation of ethical principles for argument (and for communication in a more general sense)

- To approach argument from an ethical and socially responsible standpoint.

The syllabus also has a section on freedom of speech and its responsibilities. This section states that:

> The University of Maryland encourages instructors and students to foster civic engagement in the classroom, meaning that we will be discussing social, cultural, and political issues throughout the course. The design of this course encourages students to engage in controversial and at times divisive political and social issues. We will discuss in class the ethics of argumentation, and it will be

important for you to participate in these discussions in order to fully understand what constitutes ethical communication in the college classroom. (p. 2).

What skills do students consider most important in being civically engaged?

Four prominent attributes emerged from this research. These four attributes that students mentioned as important in being civically engaged are: listening, knowing one's audience, using new media and technology, and having confidence.

Listening. According to Bickford (1996), listening is central to developing democratic theory and practice. Although these students did not receive any formal training in listening and its relationship to democracy, they mentioned its importance in being civically engaged. Central to their concept of listening, however, was the idea that one needed to listen to be able to respond intelligently and quickly to their opponent. What should be taught, additionally, is the concept of empathic listening. Bickford discusses Barber's (1984) concept of listening as one that "uses the language of neighborliness, community, conversation, empathy, and common consciousness" (p. 13-14). Teaching students that listening is neighborly and not adversary, that focuses on community and not competition, should be the focus is an important step in listening training.

Ethical listening needs to be taught and discussed in classrooms, as well. Colby et al. (2007) note that active listening skills are one of the most important attributes that need to be taught in the development of civic engagement. Purdy (1995) argues that

listening is an ethical act; to choose to *not* listen is also an ethical act. Thus, students need to learn what it means to be not just an active listener, but an ethical listener.

Gayle (2004) studied a public speaking course with a civil discourse focus and found some interesting things about listeners. The assignment students were given was to give speeches supporting multiple sides of the same issue. They filled out attitude surveys before and after their speeches. She also had the listeners in the class fill out attitude surveys. She found that speakers, after analyzing their videotaped reflections, changed their attitudes 68% of the time. Thus, researching and speaking on different sides of a controversial topic has the power the change one's attitude. However, most listeners retained their original attitudes. "Even structured as it was to promote reflectiveness, the task of listening to and evaluating speeches appears not to have sufficiently involved students in progressively extending their knowledge of a particular controversial topic" (p. 182). She ends with a call to address listener engagement in our classes. This reflects my call for more, and better, listening training in communication courses.

Audience. Most public speaking textbooks emphasize that knowledge of audience is an important factor in creating effective public speeches. Hogan et al. (2008) are no exception. Fortunately, the students in this study also noted the importance of understanding one's audience when preparing to speak in public on civic issues. They also discussed the modern issue of politicians needing to adapt their speeches to larger, even nationwide, audiences. Clearly, audience analysis is taught in most communication

courses with a public speaking or debate component, and this is an important addition to the curriculum.

Understanding media and technology. As discussed in chapter two, media literacy is an important, and sometimes overlooked, component of communication education. Most of the students talked about the media as if it were coming from "on high," presenting facts for them to consume. Students need to be taught to critically evaluate the media. The United States is typically observed to be lacking in media literacy education compared to other counties (Potter, 2008; Brown, 2001). Students in the United States are also more likely *not* to read newspapers or watch the news, and are more likely to get their news from the Internet and from satirical news programs, such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). Of course, much political information on the web is questionable. According to Colby et al. (2007), "much television news coverage is notoriously superficial, and may not sustain the attention of viewers in any case" (p. 48). As in the case with these students, many people are willing to take the opinion of "opinion leaders" as truth. One study found that liberals are more likely to follow the advice of liberal talk show host Phil Donahue, while conservatives were more likely to follow the advice of Rush Limbaugh, on the issue of crime, on which neither are experts (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998).

Where does this leave American students in the quest for civic engagement? It constitutes a call for communication educators to incorporate media literacy into their curriculum. This research sees media literacy as an integral component of civic

education, one that has not been studied often. A renewed, or perhaps new, focus on media literacy in the development of civic engagement is in order.

Confidence. Although students talked about confidence as a skill they would hope to gain, confidence is more of an attribute that students have and can improve upon. To this researcher's knowledge, no research has been conducted on the role of confidence in being a civically engaged young person. O'Brien (2003) notes in her research of North Carolina youth that many students have a high level of confidence in their civic engagement attributes, but do not have the knowledge to back up this confidence. This was a non-voting-age sample, so there is no data on college students' confidence of their civic knowledge, attributes, or motivations.

How do students perceive that public speaking and debate are related to civic engagement?

Fortunately, the students all saw speaking and debate as directly related to civic engagement. One student, Thomas, mentioned that those who learn to be proficient at public speaking and debate are destined to be leaders in the civic engagement movement. They are future political leaders. Brandon mentioned a similar idea, that public speaking was for "leaders" in the community.

Implications

There are four key implications of this study. First, listening training should be incorporated into more classes, not just in college, but in K-12 education as well.

Second, media literacy training should be more prevalent in the curriculum. Also, students should be provided with opportunities to connect the attributes they are learning with real-world opportunities to practice them. In order to truly connect attributes to the real world, students need to be metacognitive about those attributes, which is referred to as self-regulated learning. Finally, campus organizations that promote civic engagement, such as TerpImpact, need to be better understood and known by students.

Listening Training. It is well-documented that listening is rarely taught on its own, but usually as one chapter during the basic communication course (Janusik, 2002). Listening education should be incorporated into all communication courses. Colby et al. (2007) devote two pages to an example of listening as an important democratic skill. They note that calling something a skill means it is "done with greater or less expertise" and unfortunately, most educators who talk about listening as a skill are talking about listening *more*, not listening *better* (p. 127). Thus, training in listening should incorporate models of what effective listening looks like.

One student in a training course discussed by Colby et al. (2007) noted that effective listening includes "the ability to set aside one's strong initial judgments or emotional reactions while listening to others" (p. 128). This is what an ethic of listening would look like. According to Johannesen (1996) in his *Ethics of Communication* book, ethical listening includes "reasoned skepticism," which is finding a halfway point between being too open-minded and gullible versus being too dogmatic or close-minded. It also includes knowing about the issue being discussed.

Bickford (1996) also argues for the centrality of listening in a participatory democracy. She notes, "Listening—as part of a conception of adversarial communication—is a crucial political activity that enables us to give democratic shape to our being together in the world" (p. 19). Bickford uses the work of Benjamin Barber (2004) to ground her argument. Barber believes both speaking and listening together create a "creative consensus" that encourages neighborly communication.

Media Literacy Training. Media literacy training often is incorporated into K-12 social studies, when it is incorporated into the curriculum at all. Communication courses would be ideal places to incorporate more media literacy training, and it is essential for training in democratic participation. Hobbs (1998) argues that media literacy training is an integral component of participatory democracy and civic engagement. Media literacy includes, but is not limited to, speaking and listening, attributes that we hope to teach students in communication courses. But the connection to media is not always made in training for these attributes.

Hobbs (1998) argues that there are three ways media literacy (her focus is K-12) can strengthen democracy. First, media literacy helps strengthen students' processes of analysis and communication skills and learn about things like how the press functions, and why it is important for citizens to have free access to information and diverse opinions. Second, media literacy helps "support and foster" environments where students can practice being leaders, expressing themselves, and building consensus. Third, media literacy skills can "inspire young people to become more interested in increasing their access to diverse sources of information" (p. 4). Her ultimate argument is that "It is

impossible to have a healthy democracy unless there are healthy, competent, engaged citizens" and in the U.S., unfortunately, there are 44 million adults who lack even basic literacy skills, making literacy more important to teach than ever.

Opportunities for Public Action in Class. As Brammer and Wolter (2008) discovered, the best way to get students to understand how to take action, and to increase their desire to take action, is to provide opportunities for students in their community during a communication class. In their course, which they call Civic Discourse, public speaking is incorporated into the broader goal of getting students involved in their communities. Students are required to take direct action in the community, whether that is campus, the town in which campus is situated, or their hometowns. They must provide proof of their action, and reflect on this action and its relationship to civic engagement.

Most students in this study reported that they felt they had gained attributes that could be used in their civic engagement efforts, such as confidence in speaking or even listening about current events through other students' debates and speeches. However, nearly all reported that if they wanted to take an issue out to the community, they would not know how to do it. Therefore, this research suggests that communication courses incorporate opportunities for students to take direct action in the community and teach them where to start.

Connect with TerpImpact. The University of Maryland does have an organization that teaches students how to get involved. Unfortunately, none of the students interviewed knew about this organization, The Center for Civic Engagement and

Learning (CCEL), also known as TerpImpact (www.TerpImpact.umd.edu). One student was a member of CIVICUS, a living and learning program dedicated to civic engagement, and one student was a former member of Beyond the Classroom, another living and learning community focused on community and civic engagement. However, not even these two students knew about TerpImpact.

On their website, TerpImpact has a section devoted to students who want to do more, but do not know where to start. Here they link students to Do Something More, Donate Life Maryland, Maryland Wishes, Idealist, and various campus advocacy groups, which number 37 at the university and include everything from Amnesty International to Students for Sensible Drug Policy. However, if students do not know to start at TerpImpact, they cannot find their way to these resources. A survey of university students should be taken to know how many are aware of TerpImpact, and who is interested in their services.

The Role of Self-Regulated Learning in Civic Engagement

Without metacognitive reflection, students cannot learn from their own experience (Colby et al., 2007). Thus, we should strive to teach students to reflect on what they are learning, and to link this learning to political engagement. This also can teach them to apply their new skills to different areas of political engagement and different contexts. One instructor in the Political Engagement Project (PEP) used critical reflection papers to have students tie their skills to the real world and reflect on what they had learned.

Students also need to know that these attributes can be learned. Many students will announce at the beginning of a class that they are "terrible" public speakers, but public speaking, group communication, and leadership are all attributes that can be learned. By scaffolding students' self-regulation as they learn these attributes, they will be more likely to incorporate them into their political lives.

Limitations of the Study

This study had only six participants, as consistent with case study methodology. However, studying a greater number of students could be extremely beneficial in discovering the prevalence of these themes in communication undergraduate students. More interviews with the same students could have uncovered even more about the themes discussed here. Quantitative research would add another dimension to this study, although CIRCLE and other organizations have much quantitative data to add to the research on civic engagement.

Additionally, the six students chosen were already engaged, at least in their communities, and active in this particular class. Talking to students who were *not* currently engaged would be very interesting and add a new dimension to the ideas presented here. Students at other universities, such as those in the District (American University, Georgetown University, and George Washington University, for example), might already be more naturally engaged politically, and their voices would add another interesting dimension to this research as well.

Conclusion

This study examined the habits and civic lives of six university students enrolled in an upper-level communication course. Case study descriptions of each student were provided to demonstrate how the students perceived themselves as civically engaged citizens. Themes uncovered included the importance of listening; mixed ideas on whether Americans are more or less civically engaged; community service as the ideal of civic engagement; President Obama as historical; translation of skills to the public arena; confidence as key; media and technology; and importance of audience.

The future of this nation depends on the current generation of students. If the trend cited in Putnam (2000) continues, that is bad news for our democracy. Although some would argue that family is the ideal place for students to learn about civic engagement, many others (Colby et al., 2007) argue that higher education is ideally suited for training in political and social engagement. The National Communication Association, through its discussion of service learning, is starting to recognize that Communication is a central part of that engagement. Public speaking skills, which enhance confidence, small group skills, which encourage and teach effective participation, and listening, which teaches ethical, critical, and empathic listening skills, are all central components of civic engagement. It is time for the Communication discipline to step up and take its place as the ideal center for civic engagement education.

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