CIVIC LITERACY/KNOWLEDGE


The 2007 study, administered by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, surveys 1514 adults to gauge their understanding of and support for the Courts. Major findings from the survey indicate that a majority of the American public know little about the workings of the U.S. Supreme Court.


Delli Caprini examines civic literacy in the United States including literacy trends over the past fifty years, how knowledge is distributed among groups, and how the knowledge impacts voting and elections. Further, the author draws on his own empirical research to discuss the individual and societal benefits of politically informed citizens, and the perils associated with civic incompetence.


The authors provide an overview of the political socialization process and the acquisition of political knowledge, and maintain that the study of youth, political theory, and civic activism is both complex and normative. The authors conclude that there is a need to determine the linkage between civic knowledge and civic engagement.


Eschrich’s report surveys a cohort of students from the 2010 We the People (WTP) competition finals to gain insight on the material they learn and their general thoughts on the program. Key findings are that that WTP participants scored higher than the national average in every measurable category, were more likely to vote and engage in civic activities, were more likely to agree on the importance of staying politically active, and were more likely to agree that individuals should be able to express unpopular opinions and that newspapers should be able to publish freely.

This survey paints a discouraging picture of the civic aptitude of the American public. Results from the survey confirm that two-thirds of the thousand American adults polled could not name a single U.S. Supreme Court Justice.


The author provides insight into traditional classroom-based civic education and community-based civic experiences as well as strategies to raise the level of political knowledge of today’s youth.


The author references a UCLA study surveying 250,000 incoming college freshman that has been conducted annually since the mid-1960’s. During that time, every significant indicator of political engagement has fallen by half. Only 34% of those surveyed currently think keeping up with politics is important. This article gives evidence of a steady decline in civic literacy, and offers theories that might help explain that decline.


Galston addresses the dismal state of civic knowledge in America despite large increases in formal education. The author notes that, paradoxically, although civic knowledge has been in a state of decline over the past fifty years, political engagement and volunteering have increased.


The article provides an assessment of student civic literacy across four dimensions: American political heritage, government structure, current politics, and the Constitution. A major finding from the report is that 86.5% of students failed the naturalization test (96% failed to score a “C” or better). However, contrary to previous research, the article reported that based upon pre- and post-tests, researchers found a significant improvement in civic literacy one semester after students took a one-semester government class.

The ICI includes an overview of the development and methodology of their civic literacy test. Specific information provided includes: survey question development, interview techniques and sample size, survey population, randomized sample selection, weighting, participation questions for identifying respondents’ civic and political experience, analyses and report writing, and techniques for identifying the impact of college and knowledge on civic engagement.


The ICI presents results from the 2008 American Civic Literacy Test, in which a random sample of 2,508 students were tested. Seventy-one point four percent of the respondents received a failing grade.


Kennedy surveys the empirical research and addresses the evidence of a deficit in civic literacy in the United States. The author goes on to postulate “a connection between civic literacy deficits and increases in political polarization and governmental dysfunction.”


In this article, Kiernan discusses effective strategies for developing civic literacy through exercises empowering students as members of a democratic community.


The authors attempt to examine misconceptions by the American people about the Iraq War and that country’s participation in terrorist activities. The report highlights a connection between the frequency of misperceptions and the participant’s primary news source.

In this article, McCall draws upon the work of Henry Milner and his extensive research on the topic of civic literacy. The author goes on to compare the concept of social capital to civic literacy as a predictor of a country’s ability to support democracy, and ultimately concludes that civic literacy is a more appropriate predictor because of its quantifiable elements.


The author takes an in-depth look at the topic of civic literacy in effective democracies and argues that it is the single most important predictor of political participation. The author supports his position on the impact of civic literacy with a wealth of empirical findings from many various democracies around the world.


The 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report surveys more than 25,000, 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students to gauge their civic knowledge. Compared to the 1998 survey administered by the NAEP, the findings indicate that, statistically, no group showed a significant increase in civic literacy. The report confirms that more than two-thirds of each group was at or just above a basic civic literacy level.


The 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report surveys more than 25,000, 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students to gauge their civic knowledge. Compared to the 1998 and 2006 NAEP civic assessments, the report concludes that 12th grade student scores had declined since 1998 and 2006.


Results from the 1997 poll indicate that only five percent of the thousand people surveyed could correctly answer ten fundamental questions about the Constitution. Major findings from the survey show that: more than half polled did not know the correct number of US Senators, only six percent could name four rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, one out of six believed the Constitution established America as a Christian nation, and eighty-four percent believed that “all men are created equal” appears in the Constitution.

The 2007 study compares the civic literacy of We the People (WTP) participants to students in high school government classes and political science majors at two universities. Students who had participated in WTP had greater civic knowledge than non-participants. Further, the study found that WTP participants were better able to analyze issues, debate, persuade, and achieve group consensus.


Romano highlights findings from a *Newsweek* survey in which thirty-eight percent of Americans failed to correctly identify significant events in U.S. history.


Schudson examines the civic literacy of the American public and poses the question—“how can so many, knowing so little, and voting in such small numbers, build a democracy that appears to be successful?” The author suggests that the complexity of U.S. political institutions is a major deterrent to public understanding of elections and voting, and points to voters reliance on heuristics as an outcome of limited information.


Shenkman examines the civic knowledge of the American people and suggests that American voters are paying less attention to politics now than in the past. The author offers proposals to improve the situation, including reforms of major institutions including government, political parties, the media, and civic organizations.


Findings from the 2008 study indicate that approximately forty-nine percent of Americans could not pass a civic literacy test. Tellingly, elected officials scored even lower than the general public, with an average score of forty-four percent.
CIVIC EDUCATION


Barber discusses a rejuvenation of the campus community service movement and its potential to invigorate the meaning of citizenship in a democracy. The author argues that civic education should be an integral part of a liberal education and that community service can help better prepare students for citizenship. Barber highlights a Rutgers University program to illustrate how service and citizen education can be linked effectively.


Bernstein studies the impact of simulations on student learning and civic competence; he defines civic competence as “an individual’s skill and ability to make sense of vast amounts of political information; to work with others (and in civil opposition to other people’s ideas) where appropriate; and to develop effective strategies for political action”. The simulations the author examines are successful in building political skills, but differ across gender and racial lines. Bernstein finds “that their feelings of confidence are driven largely by the skills they have attained and not by the objective political knowledge they have gained.”


The authors conceptualize the role of institutions of higher education in producing “engaged citizens.” The book draws on the work of experts from various disciplines to discuss the implications of an increased focus by colleges and universities on civic learning and engagement.


Checkoway examines the role of research universities as institutions that can improve civic engagement in students, and suggests strategies for how to strengthen student learning, get the faculty more engaged, increase institutional capacity, and connect democracy and diversity as complementary educational objectives.

The article examines research on citizenship education, identifying how citizenship education impacts 21st century skills, civic learning opportunities and achievement gaps.


The author surveys twenty-one essays that discuss the challenges of incorporating civic responsibility into student’s experiences in institutions of higher education.


Fleming discusses a report released by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) highlighting low standards in the nation’s high school curricula for civic education; only eight states have standardized tests for civics and U.S. government and just two require students to pass the examination in order to graduate. The author argues that the abysmal state of civics in the U.S. education is, in part, due to the lack of required testing; he also argues that civic education is critical to the development of “21st-century skills.”


This article examines the impact of adult civic education programs on political participation in the Dominican Republic and South Africa. The findings suggest that civic education and group mobilization processes are complementary in both countries. The author asserts that civic education influences individual political behavior in much the same way that participation does in other types of group activities.


Finklestein identifies and analyzes the prescriptions of four groups of civic educational reformers: civic imperials, civic spiritualists, civic intellectuals, and civic communitarians.

The authors analyze different ideas, initiatives, and experiments intended to make students more cognizant of social differences in their community. They discuss learning communities, residential communities, and public service activities on campuses, and the ways in which each approach nurtures the development of democratic sensibility, citizenship skills, and multicultural fluency.


Hess challenges the practice of avoiding controversial topics in the school curriculum and argues that her own empirical research demonstrates the efficacy of teaching civics through such methods.


The 2011 study by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute aims to gauge the quality of civic education in the United States by surveying over 2,500 adults. The study was intended to determine the impact college education has on motivating citizens to become more actively engaged in the political process. Results from the study indicate that, a college education has zero impact on citizen involvement. Only civic knowledge influenced active civic engagement.


The authors discuss the lack of civic engagement among young adults in America, and contend that civic educators need to focus attention on digital and social media mechanisms to improve engagement and participation.


The author examines the relationship between institutions of higher education and their partners in the community. Maurasse identifies plausible challenges such partnerships face and offers a roadmap for ways in which the partnerships can improve the community.

This article defines responsible citizenship in a democratic society and its requisite skills; reviews higher education’s role in civic education; identifies ways colleges and universities can help develop the skills required for citizenship and public life; and suggests ways that campuses can create environments for civic learning through teaching, governance, extracurricular activities, campus life, and community relations.


The authors use data from the 1988 NAEP findings to further examine the impact of civics in the high school curriculum. Niemi and Junn find that 12th grade civics courses give students a two percentage-point advantage over students who had taken an earlier government course, and a four percentage-point advantage over students who did not take any civics courses.


The authors explore the possibility of community colleges serving as agents to increase civic literacy through service learning and community-based programming. The book provides the theoretical framework and practical models for how community colleges can improve the civic literacy of students.


The author examines the “National Standards for Civics and Government,” set forth by the Center for Civic Education in 1994. Patrick concludes that since the standard was created, it has become the criterion by which programs and practices are evaluated.


Ravitch and Viteritti bring together experts from a variety of disciplines to discuss the relationship between a healthy democracy and education. The book investigates the role of education in helping develop and improve students’ civic responsibility.

In this study, the authors attempt to answer the question—“what are teachers trying to teach our youth about citizenship and what it means to be an American?” The study surveyed a random sample of public, private, and Catholic social studies teachers and convened three focus groups. Only twenty-four percent of the teachers reported feeling “very confident” that their students know the protections provided by the Bill of Rights.


Shermis examines the evolution of civic education from its origins in the late 1800s through the twentieth century. The author also examines the objectives of historians, sociologists, and advocates of the Americanism movement in advancing citizenship training. Shermis concludes that the failure to achieve some of the original goals of social studies is attributable to their inconsistency with patriotic indoctrination.


Stanley discusses approaches that contribute to civic education in the U.S. and argues that compartmentalized approaches are not as effective as broader, more aggressive methods.


The author examines results from a survey given to future teachers to determine their capacity for teaching civics courses. Findings from the report suggest that a large percentage of these individuals had insufficient knowledge of subject matter related to civic education and Constitutionalism.

Stedman discusses the evolution of the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) from a privately-funded initiative to an Congressionally-legislated program that focuses on monitoring the progress and achievement of students. The report goes on to describe NAEP’s trend assessment, how its work has influenced the public discussion on education, and other major findings.


Stotsky’s collection of essays offers a new approach to the strengthening and development of students’ civic identity in America through the teaching of reading, writing, speech, and literature.


The author addresses the necessity of addressing psychological studies when considering civic learning. Torney-Purta argues that changes must begin with teacher education and should be focused on changing classroom climate, where teachers’ attitudes towards the use of democratic or authoritarian processes can exert great influence; and understanding students and teachers as developing individuals.


Walling examines the history of civic education in America and efforts by the Center for Civic Education to improve the current state of the topic. The author provides an optimistic assessment of the country’s ability to improve civic education.


The authors describe the benefits of intergenerational programming in the community and outline effective strategies for planning and executing small to large scale activities.

Researchers from the University of Chicago and Mills College discuss results of a national study of new media and politics among the American youth. Among other findings, Cohen and Kahne describe how teens and young adults are increasingly engaging in “participatory politics” through new media avenues.


Diemer addresses civic participation disparities among racial/ethnic groups, and an open scholarly question—whether youths’ commitment to create social change predicts their traditional participation. He emphasizes parents’ role in fostering marginalized youths’ civic and political participation.


The authors highlight efforts by a community college in Plano, Texas to address students’ lack of civic involvement through a collaboration of service-learning and learning community programs. The interdisciplinary approach combines two or more courses with a common theme, allowing students to understand the connection between the disciplines.


Hollander and Burack discuss the state of civic engagement by American youth and strive to gain a better understanding of what prompts young people to develop lasting habits of engagement. The report provides an overview of current research and suggests a research agenda for advancing our understanding, of civic engagement.

Levine examines unemployment in Nevada and North Dakota and attempts to determine whether there is a correlation between civic engagement and unemployment. Findings suggest a significant correlation between civic engagement and higher rates of employment.


This study looked at three cohorts of high school students—one without a community service requirement and two with such a requirement. Those students who were already inclined to serve, didn’t experience any advantage, but the students who were less inclined to serve initially showed marked gains on three of four civic measures after completing the course requirement.


This report details the civic development efforts of a high school in Massachusetts where students meet once a week to discuss governance and school-related issues, participate in community service projects, and pursue other cluster-related activities. Findings from the study suggest the program increases student participation in community service projects and improves their political knowledge.


Morrissey reports on indicators of citizen participation in empowerment zone and enterprise community programs for ten highly distressed rural communities. The research aims to determine the level and quality of participation, the impact of participation on self-development and the influence of participation on policy or change.


The authors provide a framework for economic, physical, and social environmental predictors of participation in community organizations. The study analyzes empirical data from three major US cities used to predict participation in community organizations.

The authors discuss elements of grassroots community action relevant to concepts of social action, locality development, and empowerment. The proliferation of these organizations is discussed together with challenges they face, including the role of outside experts, the use of specialized information, and connections to coalitions and larger social movements.


The article discusses the role of deliberative persuasion or propaganda in social action. Pratkanis argues that genuine democratic social change can only be achieved by anticipating the propaganda and encouraging deliberative persuasion. The article discusses characteristics of the persuasion landscape, identifies obstacles to deliberative persuasion, and discusses methods for promoting deliberative persuasion.


Putnam discusses the reduction of social capital in America, and concludes that non-social activities, such as television and the Internet, have contributed to the loss.


Rimmerman examines grassroots mobilization, community activism, service learning, and use of technology in efforts to combat the breakdown of civility in the U.S. political system. The author discusses alternatives to voting that can allow citizens to communicate their discontent with government. Rimmerman also touches on the attitudes and values of college students as they transition into a more engaging role within the political system.
ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

CITIZENSHIP


The publication addresses the marginalizing effect on public service of disillusionment with public life in the U.S. The author describes ways in which public work can be used to improve citizenship and rejuvenate public life.


Butts discusses the practice of citizenship from the perspectives of a magnitude of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. The author contends that the mission of civic education is best served when the focus is on commonly shared values by multiple groups. The report illuminates how the theme of citizenship could be used as a galvanizing element in a common core of studies, giving a scholarly foundation to moral and civic education; and providing a common ground for a pluralistic society.


The author provides an overview of the history of civic education and discusses the distinction between civic and citizenship education, content and reflective inquiry approaches and their integration through national standards, and the future of civic education in the country.


Hahn reports on the status of civic education in six countries—USA, Britain, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Australia. Diverse policies and practices in the respective countries were found to be associated with different patterns of adolescent political attitudes and perceptions. The report suggests that in environments where students are able to express their opinions and engage in the policymaking process, they are more interested in political issues.


The inaugural report examined the civic behaviors and attitudes of Hoosiers using U.S. Census Bureau and Current Population Survey (CPS) data. The report discusses the challenges that affect how Hoosiers participate in civic life.

Levine and Gastil discuss strategies for generating a renewed democracy through, “rich case materials from many cities and types of institutional settings with careful reflection on core principles.”


Owen discusses the complexity of the American presidential election and considers how this complexity challenges voters. She examines the civic literacy of American students, and a variety of issues related to education for voting and elections. The author concludes by offering suggestions for improving participation.


The author discusses the importance of constitutions and constitutionalism, and argues that the primary objective of education for democratic citizenship should be to impart knowledge of constitutionalism.


The authors describe efforts to redefine the habits that contribute to improved citizenship, enhance citizens’ sense of connectedness to a community, and support best practices, basic values, and institutions vital to the democratic process.


Steinberg and Norris discuss the importance of preparing American students to become civically engaged. They assess key dimensions in the development of a civic-minded graduate (CMG).


Westheimer and Kahne call attention to a range of ideas on the essential attributes of good citizens and methods for encouraging those attributes in civic education programs.
SERVICE-LEARNING


The authors examine partnership opportunities focused on civic renewal and declare these partnerships paramount for nurturing democratic communities. The article explores the relationship between civic renewal in higher education and service-learning.


Lisman provides a basic explanation of service learning and its relationship to civic virtue. The author argues that certain approaches to service learning are ineffective because of their “association with weak democracy or procedural republicanism.” His basic argument is for a progressive communitarian public philosophy, grounded in a conviction that individuals achieve meaning and significance in the context of community.


Shastri explores three decades of service-learning research that finds content knowledge does develop leadership skills, self-esteem, teamwork, communication skills and acceptance of cultural diversity, but notes that issues of intellectual and cognitive development have been underexplored.


Soule discusses “We the People...The Citizen and the Constitution,” an instructional program for students intended to provide education on the United States foundational principles. The author discusses results of a survey conducted in 2000 that found WTP participants to be more knowledgeable about U.S. democratic institutions and processes than non-participants.