

**Digital Democracy at Northwestern:
A Look at Civic Engagement in an Internet Age**

Dan A. Lewis
Jacob L. Nelson
Ryan Lei
Emily Hittner

Abstract: Though the internet has redefined interactions between the individual and the community, the U.S. civic engagement that so impressed Tocqueville still occurs today. Using data derived from a longitudinal survey of undergraduate students at a Northwestern University, we find that forms of digital engagement fill the void left by drops in more conventional forms of democratic participation. We also find that educators have an important role to play in cultivating and maintaining online and offline political engagement among younger people. Scholars and educators need to develop curricula that can build upon the ways college students currently participate in democracy.*

**A special thanks to Mary Desler for facilitating our data collection.*

The dominant scholarly view of civic engagement in the United States is a bleak one. Putnam (2000) and others have argued that we have lost our way and that many people have withdrawn from community and political life. They argue that political involvement is low (McMillan & Harriger, 2007) and community is dying (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Nielsen, 2015). In this paper, we propose a different perspective. Following Tocqueville, we argue that there is a complicated interplay between individualism and community engagement in the United States that flows from the origins of our democracy. The importance of face to face interactions has been with us since the beginning of the Republic, along with print and later the telegraph and then telephones and television. With each technological innovation, this complex interplay between self and other takes on different forms. At first, each of these innovations was misunderstood and misjudged (Allen & Light, 2015). The present is no exception with the internet.

The internet has redefined interactions between the individual and the community – indeed, it has redefined what “community” even means – especially for young people. The importance of the physical community has waned, but the internet has provided an opportunity to cultivate new, digital communities, and with it a new kind of political engagement (Allen & Light, 2015; Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Zuckerman, 2014; Zukin, 2006). The result is both exciting and concerning. We argue that the internet has brought young people to civic life in ways that could never have been imagined by Tocqueville, and we build upon his fundamental observation that Americans band together to solve problems. However, the internet has also created a real challenge for educators uncertain how to encourage this new kind of civic engagement.

Using a multilevel modeling analysis of longitudinal survey data of undergraduates, we show that students are far more civically engaged online than offline. We also show that students who took classes that stressed civic learning were more engaged online throughout their years at college than those who took classes that did not stress civic learning. What's more, the online engagement for these students *increased* over time. We also find that students who took civic learning classes maintained offline civic engagement over time, while students in classes that did not stress civic learning showed a significant decrease. Our analysis joins the growing scholarship that finds younger people to be far more civically engaged than many expect (Allen & Light, 2015; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Metzger, Erete, Barton, Desler, & Lewis, 2015; Zukin, 2006), and that educators play an integral part in nurturing that engagement (Beaumont, 2011; Bobkowski & Miller, 2016; Boyte, 2008; Lewis, 2014; McMillan & Harriger, 2007; Ronan, 2011; Zuckerman, 2014).

Our findings reveal that college students may not be writing letters to their local politicians, but they are engaging digitally with democracy in important ways. These forms of digital engagement, which include reading and posting about politics online, fill the void left from drops in more conventional forms of democratic participation, like attending a rally or writing a letter. To borrow from Putnam, people may be “bowling alone” in the physical world (2000), but this decrease in offline participation does not mean a net loss for democratic engagement or for community. It instead points to expanding definitions of the terms “engagement” and “community,” and a need for educators to reckon with these expansions when deciding how best to encourage participatory citizenship in a more “personal democracy” (Crenson & Ginsberg, 2002).

The collapse of the local community

Tocqueville extolled the community as the gateway to American democracy. Communities, as Tocqueville observed, were self-contained settlements where citizens relished the participatory roles they felt obliged to play. The community offered citizens the opportunity to get involved in politics in a real and meaningful way (Tocqueville, 2012). This participation gave community members faith in public affairs, and a sense of how their lives fit into the larger society (Bellah et al., 1985). Educational institutions were crucial for teaching citizens that they had important roles to play in pursuit of the “common good” within their communities (Ronan, 2011, p. 13; Tocqueville, 2012).

Scholars observing local communities a century later found a vastly changed environment. In a post-industrial and globalized world, communities could no longer be self-contained, and it became harder for citizens to see their work as contributions to the greater good (Bellah et al., 1985; Nielsen, 2015). Individualism, which both impressed and worried Tocqueville in his studies of American society (2012), became the defining characteristic of its citizens. The absence of an obvious collective goal to work towards, combined with a powerful emphasis on self-interest, resulted in a mass retreat from Tocqueville’s ideal of the community (Putnam, 2000; Wolin, 2003). Local communities became harder to maintain, and people grew less motivated to engage with other citizens (Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Choon Ryul, 1996).

The loss of the self-contained community left citizens unsure where to turn for fulfillment, and unsure even about the meaning of citizenship (Bellah et al., 1985). Equally distressing, it left them with less faith in government: Trust in the government decreased from 77% in 1958 to 19% in 2015 (Doherty, Kiley, Tyson, & Jameson, 2015).

Politics, which once meant ordinary citizens working together to solve problems, became something that felt disembodied from citizens and beyond their control (Nielsen, 2015). As a result, the perceived responsibilities of citizenship have diminished from one generation to the next. The current generation of young people is reportedly less trusting of their fellow citizens, less likely to feel like they can make a difference in politics, and more likely to need to be persuaded to follow public affairs (Zukin, 2006).

Bellah et al. (1985) saw the solution to this discontent in the strengthening of citizen groups. When people banded together in associations and movements, they could more forcefully influence government. Only more democratic participation would lead to a revival of the political (Wolin, 2003). This would bring back the sense of community that Tocqueville so admired, and that Putnam lamented had all but vanished from American society. The reemergence of this sense of community would restore political agency to citizens, allowing them to believe again that they have a role to play in public affairs, and that politics is efficient and tangible rather than unwieldy and abstract. In other words, this would “increase the prestige of government” (1985, p. 211). Over the past two decades, citizen groups have increasingly banded together in this way on the internet.

The rise of the online community

As the internet has grown into an indispensable tool for people interested in connecting with others and staying informed, it has simultaneously become a popular source for civic and political engagement (Smith, 2013). For example, there are about two billion users between both Facebook and Twitter, and a majority report using both to get news (Barthel, Shearer, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2015). In addition to offering citizens

the ability to follow news, these social media platforms offer opportunities for citizens to group together based on shared civic and political goals. These online communities can lead to more comprehensive perspectives of the “real world” community (Rosenberry, 2010), and can mobilize people to pursue real world changes. Trending Twitter hashtags have cost politicians elections (Allen & Light, 2015), and private citizens their jobs (Ronson, 2015). Most recently, mobilization on social media has been used to call attention to the deaths of unarmed black men at the hands of police that have occurred in cities throughout the U.S. (Kang, 2015). In this instance, online communities used their solidarity and digital savvy to circulate their own narratives, without relying on mainstream news outlets (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). As an article describing the relationship between social media and the success of the Black Lives Matters movement puts it, “If you’re a civil rights activist in 2015 and you need to get some news out, your first move is to choose a[n online] platform” (Stephen, 2015).

The internet is not the first media platform found to be important for introducing youth to a political world (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009) or cultivating civic participation (Ksiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010). There have been multiple instances in American society where “new media” have had transformative effects on communication and civic engagement, from Roosevelt’s radio “fireside chats” to the televised Nixon-Kennedy debates (Allen & Light, 2015). And like the internet, these new media were typically feared before they were welcomed. Worries about how the internet will diminish political engagement echo earlier concerns that television would reduce political participation and news consumption (Katz, 1996). The current challenge is to see past our fears of the transformative effects of the digital age and “understand it, both in itself and also as a

context for evolutions in civic and political engagement” (Allen & Light, 2015, p. 35). In other words, the internet should be understood less in terms of what it might lead to (e.g. the end of political engagement as we know it), and more in terms of what it actually is: a tool that offers, among other things, “a practical and efficient way for interactive communication to occur among citizens of a community grappling with a public issue” (Rosenberry & St. John, 2010, p. 5). In short, in an era where political action can come in the form of a social media movement, it is important to realize that the internet has not just rewritten the rules of communication, but of citizenship as well.

Fortunately, as more studies focus on the effects of the internet on politics, evidence mounts that initial skepticism was unfounded. Rather than displacing civic engagement, online activity encourages it (Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005; Zukin, 2006). This is especially true for young people: About 40% of all American adults engage in political activity via social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, including two-thirds of the 18 to 24 age group (Smith, 2013). This group is more likely to engage politically on social media than in any other venue, and have been found to pursue topics they learn about within these venues via other online or offline political activities (Smith, 2013).

These online communities offer citizens the means to recapture the political agency that many worried Americans had lost (Bellah et al., 1985; Boyte, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Zuckerman calls this “participatory civics,” or civic engagement based in the embrace of digital media (2014, p. 156). Participatory civics creates agency – the ability for participants “to see their impact on the issues they’re trying to influence” (2014, p. 156). Following the death of Michael Brown, professors and students used the hashtag

#FergusonSyllabus to influence the way that educators discuss race in schools and college classrooms (Schuman, 2014). Online activism appeals to this generation because, whether in the form of a trending hashtag or a digital petition with hundreds of thousands of signatures, they can immediately see a certain kind of results.

Many studies have concluded that citizens take advantage of these online opportunities to get involved in public affairs (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Cho, Keum, & Shah, 2015; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Lee, 2015). This is consistent with studies that find consumption of traditional news media, like newspapers, to be positively related to civic engagement and political participation (Peer, Malthouse, & Calder, 2003; Rothenbuhler et al., 1996; Shaker, 2014). For instance, a decline in newspaper circulation is associated with declines in voter turnout (Clogston, 2014), while watching late night television and local television news is associated with higher rates of civic volunteerism (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009). What's more, there is little evidence of "slacktivism," the idea that a token political gesture online results in less impactful engagement offline. Online activity is not a substitute for offline engagement. Instead, many have found that the former encourages more of the latter (Christensen, 2011; Lee, 2015; Smith, 2013).

This is encouraging news, and runs counter to the idea that younger people are disengaged from politics. A generation raised in the age of mobile internet know how to develop online communities without geographic constraints, and take advantage of this ability to launch coordinated, effective campaigns (Zukin, 2006). The challenge now is to understand how online engagement develops and changes over time, and what educators can do to nurture that engagement. Much effort has focused on understanding the online

habits of younger people, and the relationship between those habits and civic engagement, but little remains known about where educators fit into that relationship.

The role of educators

College and high school instructors can motivate students to get politically engaged, both online and off (Allen & Light, 2015; Beaumont, 2011; Bobkowski & Miller, 2016; Zukin, 2006). In general, education levels are positively related with involvement in civic groups and activities (Smith, 2013). This observation may at first speak to student self-interest, assuming this engagement stems from homework assignments, but, as Bellah et al. argue (1985), it can lead to “habits of the heart.” Even Tocqueville describes civic engagement beginning with motivations of self-interest, then developing into “habit and taste” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 174; Tocqueville, 2012). Students grow engaged because courses force them, but in the process they learn what it means to be a citizen (Ronan, 2011).

Classroom exposure to political issues predicts political engagement (McMillan & Harriger, 2007). In our analysis of the first wave of our data, Metzger et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between high school classes that stressed civic responsibilities and the likelihood of contacting a public official, participating in a protest, and engaging in collective problem-solving. Beaumont (2011) similarly concluded that political learning experiences are critical for the development of political agency among young people. And Bobkowski (2016) found that high school journalism classes were positively related to voting in the years following graduation. Yet, opportunities for civic engagement as a result of social learning remain rare on college campuses (Beaumont, 2011; Metzger et al., 2015). And while much is known about how educators can influence offline examples

of civic engagement, little is known about what role they might play in nurturing engagement online.

Scholars have begun looking less at how the current generation compares to generations before in terms of their media use and political engagement, and more at how our understanding of citizenship is changing in a digital age. Lewis writes,

The question here is less “How do the young compare with their elders?” and more “What are the new forms of citizenship that are emerging?” ... Putnam and others have been looking under the streetlamp for the lost keys because the light is better there (meaning our literatures and methods are better suited for looking there), not because that is where the keys are likely to be. (2014, p. 62)

The power and immediacy of the internet is a strong draw for younger people looking to make a difference. Students have begun exploring an evolving and increasingly significant form of political agency, and educators are in the unique position to nurture and encourage that exploration. By incorporating course content that pushes students to follow politics, to consider ways of addressing social issues, and stresses “solving public problems and building democratic society” (Boyte, 2008, p. 16), higher education institutions can empower students to deliberate and take on the responsibility of engaged citizenship (McMillan & Harriger, 2007; Ronan, 2011). To do this in the digital age, these institutions must acknowledge the outsized role the internet currently plays by providing context to the online tools these students are already using. Rather than asking how online engagement compares with more traditional modes, researchers should focus on what this new engagement says about contemporary understandings of citizenship. And that is what we do in the analysis to follow. We look over time at how engaged

learning at an elite private university affects on and off line engagement for undergraduates.

Methods

The data for this project come from a longitudinal study that surveyed a random sampling of undergraduate students from a mid-sized, private university in the Midwestern United States in three waves. Students were surveyed the summer before they arrived to campus (2011), at the end of their first year (2012), and at the end of their senior year (2015). All students were invited to participate in this survey through an email requesting participation. Students had access to this email invitation for about five weeks during each wave of data collection. The first wave sampled 1,034 randomly selected undergraduates and collected 676 students (65% response rate). Only participants who consented in this first wave of data collection were invited to participate in waves two and three. 288 participants completed surveys in Wave 2 (42% response rate), and 221 of those completed surveys in Wave 3 (77% response rate).

The survey assessed levels of students' online and offline civic and political engagement, as well as information about their home and school environments that may contribute to engagement. As Metzger et al. (2015) describe in our analysis of the first wave of results, survey items were chosen from the Index of Civic and Political Engagement (Andolina, Keeter, & Zukin, 2003), the National Civic and Political Engagement of Young People Survey (Portney & O'Leary, 2007), and a survey developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Other questions examined internet use and news media consumption by participants. Apart from minor revisions, questions remained the same across all three waves.

With participants' informed consent, the survey data was linked with data collected by the university's Office of Student Affairs that captured information about selection of major, interactions with diverse students, use of various resources at the university, stress levels, and overall satisfaction at the university. The Office of Student Affairs also provided information including gender, race and ethnicity, ACT & SAT scores, hometown, parental income, parents' educational attainment, and major during freshman year. The synthesis of these two data sets allowed us to control for demographic information as we examined the relationship between undergraduate coursework and civic engagement.

Civic learning

Following Metzger et al. (2015) (who built on work from Kahne and Sport (2008)), we measured civic learning by using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) where participants answered questions about experiences that had occurred in at least one of their classes in the last year. We aggregated seven items into a civic learning index. Those items were: 'I was required to keep up with politics or government, either by reading a newspaper, watching TV, or going to the internet,' 'I learned about things in society that need to be changed,' 'I met people who work to make society better', 'the teacher focused on issues I care about,' 'The teacher encouraged students to make up their own minds about political and social topics,' 'I learned about ways to improve my community,' and 'The teacher encouraged students to discuss political and social topics on which people have differing opinions'. The scale exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .77$).

Defining engagement

There are many ways to describe how citizens interact with or follow public affairs. Some distinguish between civic volunteerism and civic participation (Shah, Schmierbach, Hawkins, Espino, & Donovan, 2002), while others distinguish between political and civic engagement — the former includes activities that specifically affect government and the latter refers to activities that are designed to promote the public good (Warren & Wicks, 2011; Zukin, 2006). There is also the question of what constitutes “engagement” and what constitutes “participation.” Some consider participation to refer primarily to offline activities, like attending campaign events or rallies (Dilliplane, 2011), while engagement refers specifically to measures of exposure to community or political news. However, others more or less use “engagement” and “participation” interchangeably (Baek, Wojcieszak, & Delli Carpini, 2012; Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Paek, Yoon, & Shah, 2005; Shah, 1998; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). In our effort to observe how online activities shape young people’s involvement with public affairs, we define civic engagement as comprising all of these activities. For the purpose of our project, we simply distinguish between online and offline civic engagement.

Online engagement

Online civic engagement was measured as a composite of three items ($\alpha = .66$): ‘Look for, read, or watch content about politics online,’ ‘Take part in discussions about politics online, for example by commenting on, responding to, forwarding, or posting such material,’ and ‘Read the news on the internet.’ Participants reported how often they took part in the first two activities on 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (‘Never’) to 5 (‘Daily’). The survey measured internet news consumption with an 8-point scale from 1 (‘Never’) to 8 (‘7 days’ a week).

Given the nested nature and missing data within the dataset, we used multilevel modeling (MLM). MLM is uniquely suited to handle unbalanced data, as it derives adjusted means clustered to the individual instead of the arithmetic mean. We first ran a fully unconditional model and determined that between-person variation accounted for 52% of the variance in online engagement ($\rho_1 = \tau_{00}/(\tau_{00} + \sigma^2)$). The following model was used to examine within-subjects variation in online engagement as a function of time:

$$\text{Level 1: ONLINEENGAGEMENT}_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i} (\text{TIME}_{it}) + e_{it}$$

Online engagement for a given person i at a given time t was modeled as a function of the intercept π_0 (the amount of engagement right before beginning college) and the amount of change expected as a function of time. In order to test our main research question, we extended the analysis to a Level 2 model to include person-level factors (i.e., enrollment in classes that stress civic learning) that may influence the change in engagement over time. The Level 2 model is as follows:

$$\pi_{0i} = \gamma_{01} + r_{0i}$$

$$\pi_{1i} = \gamma_{10} + r_{1i}$$

The first equation estimates intercepts-as-outcomes where π_{0i} is the overall intercept across participants, and was estimated as a function of the fixed effect of the predictor variable for each participant. The second equation estimates slopes-as-outcomes where π_{1i} estimates the rate of change for each participant. Combining these two equations with the predictor variables yields the following unified Level 2 equation:

$$\text{ONLINEENGAGEMENT}_{it} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{TEACHCIVIC}_{it}) + \gamma_{10}(\text{TIME}_{it}) + \gamma_{11}(\text{TIME} * \text{TEACHCIVIC}_{it}) + [e_{it} + r_{i0} + r_{i1}\text{Time}_{it}]$$

This model allowed us to examine individual differences in how much courses stressed civic learning for students as a between-persons factor in predicting online engagement in general and the change in online engagement over time.

Offline engagement

Offline civic engagement was measured by summing four items: ‘Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to express your opinion,’ ‘Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue,’ ‘Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air,’ and ‘Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration.’ As all variables were binary, summing the items allowed us to create a continuous dependent variable with which to conduct analysis. In general, most participants completed one or less of these items ($M = .67$, $SD = .72$), though there were students who reported doing all four. The analytic strategy was the same as for online engagement.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of the random-coefficient regression models for online engagement. In the Level 1 model, results indicate that time is a significant predictor of online engagement. Results from the Level 2 model, however, indicate that there is only a main effect of participating in a class that stresses civic learning, $\beta = .25$, $SE = .13$, $p = .05$ (Figure 1). Neither time nor the interaction of time and participating in a class that stresses civic engagement are a significant predictor of intercept- or slopes-as-outcomes.

Table 1 about here.

Examining the results for offline engagement, the Level 1 model indicates that time significantly predicts offline engagement, $\beta = -.17$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$. Extending

these results to a Level 2 model, however, suggests that there is an interactive effect. Both time ($\beta = .82$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$) and participation in a class that stresses civic learning ($\beta = -.26$, $SE = .09$, $p < .01$) are significant predictors of offline civic engagement, but this is qualified by an interaction between these two variables, $\beta = .17$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$. These results show that students who took classes that stressed civic learning did not reduce their offline engagement over time as much as students who did not take civic learning classes (Figure 2).

Figures 1 and 2 about here.

Discussion

A recently published report asked, “What would higher education look like if it became a ‘civic learning organization’ (Boyte, 2008, p. 4)?” Our analysis begins to answer this question by examining the relationship between undergraduate civic engagement and college courses that motivate students to learn about political and social issues. The results indicate that college courses have an important role to play in maintaining and nurturing civic engagement. Our multilevel models show that students who took courses that pushed them to follow politics and to consider ways of addressing social and public issues were more civically engaged online than those who did not. They also show that students who did not take classes that stressed civic learning showed a significant decrease in offline engagement over time, while those who did take such classes did not. In short, students that encountered coursework that encouraged them to think about political issues and pushed them to consider ways to solve political or social problems grew more engaged online and maintained civic engagement offline throughout their undergraduate experience.

The much higher level of online civic engagement among college students, as compared to offline engagement, is important for educators to bear in mind as they consider ways of working civic learning into their curriculums. Undergraduates begin college much more civically engaged online than they are offline, and remain that way throughout the pursuit of their degree. For example, the percentage of students who sign petitions offline dropped over time while online petition signing went up. During their college experience, students in our study were more likely to read and post comments about political news online than they are to canvas for a politician or write a letter to a newspaper. There is, however, one traditional form of participation a majority of students will partake in: Voting. Though most students reported that they distrusted national politicians, a majority also responded that they planned to vote in presidential elections. But in general, and consistent with prior work, this group was more likely to place their faith in community-focused efforts to solve political problems (Bellah et al., 1985; Nielsen, 2015; Putnam, 2000). Increasingly, these communities are forming online.

These online communities provide political agency to those who might otherwise feel detached and unable to tackle public problems. They allow a new generation of young people to follow political and civic issues. The reality of this more participatory news media is that it does not by itself improve public life; yet “the promise is that it could” (Rosenberry & St. John, 2010, p. 5). This promise can be reached first and foremost via engagement with this media – especially among the next generation of citizens – and by the efforts of educators to maintain and build upon that engagement.

We are not arguing that all higher education instructors need to bring civic learning into their classrooms, nor do we have a specific model in mind for what that

civic learning should look like, since it is likely to vary across diverse disciplines. Some courses use news quizzes to motivate students to keep up with current events, and these can be complemented with assignments that ask students to post an online comment about an editorial, either within the news source or via social media. History, sociology, and English courses that touch on social or political issues can ask students to blog about how their readings parallel with contemporary political and social topics. The goal is not to assess students on civic learning, but to encourage them to use these civic tools and develop their analytic skills.

Millennials are often seen as the canary in the coalmine of civic collapse. Their poor performance on the measures of traditional civic engagement (voting, working on campaigns, writing to their Congress persons, etc.) is regularly cited as evidence of the decline of American Democracy. But just as the telegraph and television changed American politics, so too has the internet, and we believe the result is a new medium through which our individualism and voluntary associational style weave together with both positive and negative results. Our analysis suggests that while the forms of citizenship may be changing, the underlying dynamics remain as Tocqueville described them. That makes this an important moment for undergraduate educators interacting with a generation raised in the internet age.

Echoing prior research (Allen & Light, 2015; Metzger et al., 2015; Zukin, 2006), these results paint an optimistic portrait of college students that shows them highly engaged in civic matters, but primarily within digital communities. We find evidence that educators have a pivotal part to play in cultivating and nurturing that engagement, both online and off. By making civic learning either a part of more college classes or a larger

part of a select few, instructors may motivate students to consider the many online and offline options for political engagement that are at their disposal. Younger people do not need to be taught how to navigate the internet, but getting them to think about societal and political problems will motivate them to explore digital communities where they can exercise their political agency. Our data reveal that these courses lead to increases in online political engagement over time, which means once students find a reason to explore these new tools of “participatory civics” (Zuckerman, 2014), they keep going.

In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah et al. write, “When education becomes an instrument for individual careerism, it cannot provide either personal meaning or civic culture” (1985, p. 293). However, deciding between preparation for citizenship or preparation for a career is a false choice. College campuses can and should provide opportunities for both (Ronan, 2011). Educators are confronted now not only with the challenge of ensuring they prepare students with the skills to successfully navigate the professional world, but also with the challenge of ensuring their curriculums speak to contemporary understandings of community and engagement. Our results show what happens when college courses meet this task. Hopefully, these findings will encourage others to follow suit. Online civic engagement should no longer be seen as a worrisome symptom of an apathetic generation, but as a sign of what the future holds for political agency.

References

- Allen, D., & Light, J. (2015). *From voice to influence : understanding citizenship in a digital age / edited by Danielle Allen and Jennifer S. Light*: The University of Chicago Press.
- Andolina, M., Keeter, S., & Zukin, C. (2003). A guide to the Index of Civic and Political Engagement. Retrieved December 2015, from <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/IndexGuide.pdf>

- Baek, Y. M., Wojcieszak, M., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2012). Online versus face-to-face deliberation: Who? Why? What? With what effects? *New Media & Society*, *14*(3), 363-383. doi:10.1177/1461444811413191
- Bakker, T. P., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). Good News for the Future? Young People, Internet Use, and Political Participation. *Communication Research*, *38*(4), 451-470. doi:10.1177/0093650210381738
- Barthel, M., Shearer, E., Gottfried, J., & Mitchell, A. (2015, July 14). The Evolving Role of News on Twitter and Facebook. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved February 10,
- Beaumont, E. (2011). Promoting Political Agency, Addressing Political Inequality: A Multilevel Model of Internal Political Efficacy. *The Journal of Politics*, *73*(1), 216-231. doi:10.1017/S0022381610000976
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart : individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bobkowski, P. S., & Miller, P. R. (2016). Civic Implications of Secondary School Journalism: Associations With Voting Propensity and Community Volunteering. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. doi:10.1177/1077699016628821
- Boyte, H. C. (2008). Information age populism. *Tikkun*, *23*(5), 48.
- Cho, J., Keum, H., & Shah, D. V. (2015). News Consumers, Opinion Leaders, and Citizen Consumers: Moderators of the Consumption–Participation Link. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *92*(1), 161-178. doi:10.1177/1077699014554766
- Christensen, H. S. (2011). Political activities on the Internet: Slackivism or political participation by other means? *First Monday*, *16*(2).
- Clogston, J. (2014). *Post-print Democracy: The Decline of Newspapers and the Effects on Political Information, Political Participation and Political Power*. (Dissertation), Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved from <https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/37155>
- Dilliplane, S. (2011). All the News You Want to Hear: The Impact of Partisan News Exposure on Political Participation. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *75*(2), 287-316. doi:10.1093/poq/nfr006
- Doherty, C., Kiley, J., Tyson, A., & Jameson, B. (2015). ~~2015~~ *Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/beyond-distrust-how-americans-view-their-government/>
- Freelon, D., McIlwain, C. D., & Clark, M. D. (2016). *Beyond the hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice*. Retrieved from Center for Media and Social Impact: <http://www.cmsimpact.org/blmreport>
- Hargittai, E., & Shaw, A. (2013). Digitally Savvy Citizenship: The Role of Internet Skills and Engagement in Young Adults' Political Participation around the 2008 Presidential Election. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *57*(2), 115-134. doi:10.1080/08838151.2013.787079
- Hoffman, L. H., & Thomson, T. L. (2009). The Effect of Television Viewing on Adolescents' Civic Participation: Political Efficacy as a Mediating Mechanism. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *53*(1), 3-21. doi:10.1080/08838150802643415

- Kahne, J., & Sporte, S. (2008). Developing citizens: a longitudinal study of the impact of classroom practices, extra-curricular activities, parent discussions, and neighborhood contexts on students' commitment to civic participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 738-766.
- Kang, J. C. (2015, May 4). 'Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us'. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 25, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/magazine/our-demand-is-simple-stop-killing-us.html?_r=0
- Katz, E. (1996). And deliver us from segmentation. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546, 22-33. Retrieved from <Go to ISI>://A1996UR82700003
- Ksiazek, T. B., Malthouse, E. C., & Webster, J. G. (2010). News-seekers and Avoiders: Exploring Patterns of Total News Consumption Across Media and the Relationship to Civic Participation. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(4), 551-568. doi:10.1080/08838151.2010.519808
- Lee, S. H. (2015). News Engagement Versus News Consumption: Does Online News Use Promote Civic Engagement? *Electronic News*, 9(2), 75-90. doi:10.1177/1931243115581415
- Lewis, D. A. (2014). Engagement and Citizenship: A New Core for the University. *Journal of General Education*, 63(1), 57-63. doi:10.1353/jge.2014.0003
- McMillan, J. J., & Harriger, K. J. (2007). *Speaking of Politics: Preparing College Students for Democratic Citizenship through Deliberative Dialogue*: Kettering Foundation.
- Metzger, M. W., Erete, S. L., Barton, D. L., Desler, M. K., & Lewis, D. A. (2015). The new political voice of young Americans: Online engagement and civic development among first-year college students. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 10(1), 55-66. doi:10.1177/1746197914558398
- Moy, P., Manosevitch, E., Stamm, K., & Dunsmore, K. (2005). Linking Dimensions of Internet Use and Civic Engagement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(3), 571-586. doi:10.1177/107769900508200306
- Nielsen, R. K. (2015). *Local journalism : the decline of newspapers and the rise of digital media*: Tauris Academic Studies.
- Paek, H.-J., Yoon, S.-H., & Shah, D. V. (2005). Local news, social integration, and community participation: hierarchical linear modeling of contextual and cross-level effects.(Author Abstract). *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(3), 587.
- Peer, L., Malthouse, E., & Calder, B. (2003). *Estimating the Effect of News Media Consumption on Political Participation*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia Marriott Hotel, Philadelphia, PA.
- Portney, K., & O'Leary, L. (2007). Civic and political engagement of America's youth: a report from the Tisch College National Survey of Civic and Political Engagement of Young People. Retrieved December 2015, from <http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/downloads/FinalReport1.pdf>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone : the collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Ronan, B. (2011). *The Civic Spectrum: How Students Become Engaged Citizens*. Retrieved from The Kettering Foundation:
- Ronson, J. (2015). *So you've been publicly shamed / Jon Ronson*: Picador.
- Rosenberry, J. (2010). Virtual Community Support for Offline Communities through Online Newspaper Message Forums (Vol. 87, pp. 154-169).
- Rosenberry, J., & St. John, B. (2010). *Public Journalism 2.0 : The Promise and Reality of a Citizen-engaged Press*. New York: Routledge.
- Rothenbuhler, E. W., Mullen, L. J., DeLaurell, R., & Choon Ryul, R. (1996). Communication, community attachment, and involvement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73(2), 445.
- Schuman, R. (2014, September 8). The Birth of the #FergusonSyllabus. *Slate*. Retrieved March 3, from http://www.slate.com/articles/life/education/2014/09/ferguson_and_college_education_sociology_and_history_professors_teach_the.html
- Shah, D. V. (1998). Civic Engagement, Interpersonal Trust, and Television Use: An Individual-Level Assessment of Social Capital. *Political Psychology*, 19(3), 469-496. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792174>
- Shah, D. V., McLeod, J. M., & Yoon, S.-H. (2001). Communication, Context, and Community: An Exploration of Print, Broadcast, and Internet Influences. *Communication Research*, 28(4), 464.
- Shah, D. V., Schmierbach, M., Hawkins, J., Espino, R., & Donovan, J. (2002). Nonrecursive Models of Internet Use and Community Engagement: Questioning Whether Time Spent Online Erodes Social Capital. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(4), 964-987. doi:10.1177/107769900207900412
- Shaker, L. (2014). Dead Newspapers and Citizens' Civic Engagement. *Political Communication*, 31(1), 131-148. doi:10.1080/10584609.2012.762817
- Smith, A. (2013). *Civic Engagement in the Digital Age*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/04/25/civic-engagement-in-the-digital-age/>
- Stephen, B. (2015, October). Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power. *Wired*. Retrieved February 25, from <http://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to-fight-the-power/>
- Tocqueville, A. d. (2012). *Democracy in America* (English ed.. ed.). Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Warren, R., & Wicks, R. H. (2011). Political Socialization: Modeling Teen Political and Civic Engagement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88(1), 156-175. doi:10.1177/107769901108800109
- Wolin, S. S. (2003). *Tocqueville between two worlds : the making of a political and theoretical life / Sheldon S. Wolin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zuckerman, E. (2014). New Media, New Civics? *Policy & Internet*, 6(2), 151-168. doi:10.1002/1944-2866.POI360
- Zukin, C. K., Scott; Andolina, Molly; Jenkins, Krista; Delli Carpini, Michael X., (2006). *A new engagement? : political participation, civic life, and the changing American citizen*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Effect estimates and standard errors for Level 1 and Level 2 models predicting online engagement.

Parameter	Level 1:	Level 2
Intercept	3.69 (.08) **	2.66 (.51) *
Time	.307 (.04) *	.17 (.25)
Civic Learning		.25 (.13)*
Time * Civic Learning		.05 (.06)

*Coefficients are estimates of the fixed effects (standard error in parentheses); * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Figure 1. Effect of classes that stress civic learning on online engagement

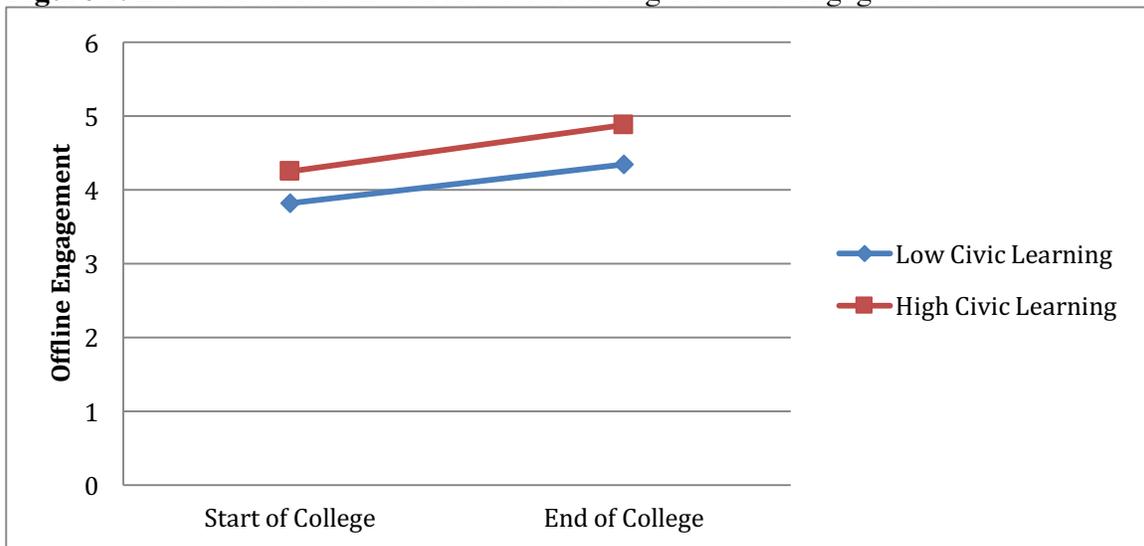


Figure 2. Effect of classes that stress civic learning on offline engagement

