

## **The Community College’s Role in Developing Students’ Civic Outcomes: Results of a National Pilot**

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In an era when the outcomes of higher education are often reduced to those which are easiest to measure (graduation rates) or that tie directly to notions of workforce preparation (occupational certificates), the *other* outcomes we hope students gain—the intangibles, the soft skills, the ability to communicate effectively and work well with others, the capacity to advance in a career instead of simply function in an occupation—are frequently overlooked. So too are the skills that allow young adults to do more than blindly consume products and ideas, the civic capacities necessary to participate meaningfully in local communities and in a democratic society. It is precisely these outcomes that are necessary for democracy to thrive, for American workers and workplaces to be creative and nimble, for citizens to engage in work (paid and unpaid) that makes them happy and fulfilled, and for people who differ from one another to work together to solve important problems.

Civic capacity and social responsibility should thus be a “non-negotiable, sought-after outcome for every student, whatever the specialty” (McTighe Musil, 2015, n.p.). Yet one might argue that civic education is *especially* important at community colleges—institutions run by and for the people, committed to lessening educational inequalities and providing educational programs and services leading to stronger communities. As Democracy’s Colleges, or The People’s Colleges, community colleges perform (or, at least, were intended to perform) both a democratizing role—they facilitate social mobility by admitting all comers regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, educational preparedness, or professional or vocational goals—

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<sup>1</sup> This project was funded by a grant from the Spencer Foundation.

and a civic function: they engage students in preparing for life and work as part of an involved citizenry (Kisker & Ronan, 2012). Ronan (2012) describes this duality in the community college mission as both “democratizing opportunity, and doing the work of democracy” (p. 31).

Community colleges do the work of democracy in a multitude of ways, ranging from more traditional methods such as service learning, voter registration drives, and classroom discussion of policy issues, to more intensive forms of democratic engagement, including deliberative dialogues, community organizing and advocacy, civic agency programs, candidate and election-issue forums, and opportunities to write or speak to legislators about issues of concern on campus or in students’ communities.

As a forthcoming inventory of community college civic programs and practices (Kisker, forthcoming in 2016) illustrates, efforts to promote civic learning and democratic engagement are variously led by faculty, administrators, staff, and sometimes, students. At some colleges, civic engagement is infused into the curriculum or embedded as a graduation requirement; elsewhere it exists primarily in extracurricular programming. Some colleges focus primarily on electoral politics and political engagement; others stress activism and involvement in causes dear to local communities. Some programs are highly institutionalized and supported on campus—for example, by incorporating civic engagement into faculty development and/or tenure/advancement policies—while others exist at the margins of the institution and are kept alive by a small group of true believers.

Educators—especially those who are involved in civic initiatives—believe strongly that these programs and practices are useful to students and lead to the outcomes mentioned previously. But beyond a handful of institution-specific surveys, most based on the self-reported growth in students’ civic outcomes immediately following an event or experience, we know very

little about the extent to which community colleges develop the civic capacities of their students. Indeed, the Civic Learning Task Force, a partnership between the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, recently commissioned a review of all instruments being used by colleges and universities to assess civic learning. This review (Reason & Hemer, 2014) reinforces the dearth of instrumentation in this area, finding that no existing surveys “fully assessed the entire construct of civic learning” (p. 3).

Thus, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges and The Democracy Commitment (TDC)—a national initiative providing a platform for the development and expansion of civic engagement in community colleges—developed a new survey to assess civic learning. In spring 2015, nine community colleges from across the nation participated in a pilot administration of this survey, allowing for the first national examination of the individual and institutional factors leading to greater civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge among community college students. Results from this pilot and future administrations of the survey will ultimately provide useful information about how community colleges can work to develop students’ civic outcomes and, in turn, enhance students’ capacity to participate meaningfully in their communities and in our democracy. After a brief discussion of the literature related to assessing students’ civic outcomes, this report describes the conceptual framework, methods, and results of the national civic outcomes pilot, administered in spring 2015.

### **Assessment of Civic Outcomes in the Literature**

The literature is clear that there is a connection between higher education and civic participation, although the nature of that association is more opaque. For example, several scholars (Lopez &

Brown, 2006; Marcelo, 2007; Newell, 2014) have found that young people with at least some college experience have higher rates of voting participation than their peers who did not attend college. Yet we do not fully understand *why* college yields this effect—is it the fostering of civic skills and political knowledge that engages students in the democratic process or simply the provision of a space where young people can connect with others, expand their horizons, and view themselves as part of a larger world (Jarvis, Montoya, & Mulvoy, 2005)?

Numerous scholars have attempted to answer this question by examining the outcomes of various civic programs, finding that they influence, among other things, students' cognitive and affective outcomes, racial understanding, sense of social responsibility, commitment to service, and leadership and communication skills (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009; Eyler et al, 2001; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkardt, 2001). However, as Finley (2011) points out, “the wealth of empirical research on civic engagement has largely focused upon activities connected with service-learning” (p. 3). Indeed, we know far less about the outcomes of democracy-building activities such as deliberative dialogues, community organizing and advocacy, and problem-solving within diverse groups (Elder, Seligsohn, & Hofrenning, 2007). The scholarship that exists (e.g., ASHE, 2006; Colby, 2008; Harringer & McMillan, 2007; Hurtado, 2009; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007; Zuniga, Williams, & Berger, 2005) is frequently limited in its ability to generalize conclusions due to small sample sizes or limited case studies. Nonetheless, it is “highly suggestive of the range of effects on students’ civic knowledge, skills, and values that may be developed through interventions that specifically integrate intentional, politically-centered, and democratically-guided forms of civic engagement” (Finlay, 2011, p. 14).

Despite the close association between concepts of democracy and the mission of community colleges (Kisker & Ronan, 2012), nearly all assessments of civic learning in higher education have occurred at universities or private, liberal arts colleges. Indeed, only a handful of studies have attempted to assess levels of civic engagement among community college students. In 2006, Lopez and Brown found that these students were more likely than high school graduates—but less likely than four-year college students—to vote or obtain news on a daily basis. They were about as likely as four-year college students to register to vote or volunteer. Newell (2014) similarly concluded that community college students were somewhat more civically engaged than high school graduates, but less engaged than their counterparts at four-year colleges and universities.

Only a handful of researchers—most often civic educators based at community colleges—have analyzed the effects of specific civic practices at two-year institutions. Through extensive follow-up surveys, Mair (forthcoming in 2016) found that students at her college were able to transfer the dialogue and deliberation skills they learned to other contexts, “from the public spheres of work and community to the personal spheres of friends, family, and significant others” (p. 8). She also reported that students feel more prepared, inspired, and responsible for addressing social issues after participating in a deliberative workshop or forum. Similarly, Hoffman (forthcoming in 2016) found that co-curricular presentations are an effective way of developing civic engagement on community college campuses, and that individuals who attend multiple civic activities exhibit higher levels of civic engagement—as measured by post-event surveys—than those who attend only one event. In other words, the more students are exposed to opportunities for civic learning, the greater their civic outcomes. This finding reinforces scholarship at both two- and four-year colleges which suggests that the more frequently students

participate in a continuum of civic learning practices, the more they make gains on a variety of civic outcomes (Bowen, 2010; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012). However, none of the studies conducted in two-year colleges control for students' civic outcomes *prior* to entering the institution, making definitive statements about the role of the community college in developing students' civic capacities difficult at best.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model of college impact provides the conceptual frame for this study. The I-E-O model takes into account student characteristics at the time of initial entry to the institution, the environment and experiences to which students are exposed, and finally, students' characteristics or outcomes after exposure to that environment. Our investigation thus presumes that students arrive at community colleges with individual background characteristics—both demographic and behavioral—that provide a baseline for their civic development, and that within the community college environment there are multiple programs, practices, policies, people, cultures, and experiences that affect students' civic outcomes. By statistically controlling for students' incoming characteristics, we can ascertain the relative impact of the college environment—and student behaviors in that environment—on the development of students' civic outcomes.

### **Methodology**

In order to collect data on both demographic (input) and college-level (environmental) factors that might influence students' civic outcomes, we designed two instruments. The first is a civic outcomes survey consisting of questions assessing students' civic agency, capacity, behavior,

and knowledge after at least one year of community college attendance, as well as questions relating to student demographics, enrollment patterns, and pre-college behaviors. The second instrument is an institutional questionnaire that asks school coordinators about college-level factors known to influence student engagement, as well as the various ways in which their institution works to develop civic learning and democratic engagement among its students.

Individual questions included in the civic outcomes survey and accompanying institutional questionnaire were informed by a wide swath of cross-disciplinary literature and are discussed in detail in Kisker, Newell, and Ronan (2014). To test the validity of the instruments, four California community colleges were invited to participate in a preliminary pilot study in spring 2014. Based on the results of this regional pilot (Kisker, Newell, & Ronan, 2014), both the civic outcomes survey and institutional questionnaire were refined to allow for more variability within responses.

### ***Survey Administration***

In spring 2015, we digitally administered the civic outcomes survey to the entire student bodies at 9 community colleges, all members of The Democracy Commitment. The purposively-selected institutions were geographically diverse, represented a variety of urban, suburban, and rural environments (as identified by the Carnegie Classifications), and ranged in size from 2,500 to 34,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students. The racial/ethnic composition of students at the colleges also varied substantially, with relatively large numbers of African Americans at some, a preponderance of Asians or Latinos at others, and heavily White populations elsewhere. Seven of the 9 colleges received a small stipend for participating; the remaining 2 agreed to participate without compensation.

From a total of 98,838 recipients, 4,788 usable surveys were returned, for an aggregate 5% response rate. The sample included more women than men, more full-timers than part-timers, a higher rate of students between the ages of 20 and 24 than those in other age groups, and about equal representation of White students to students of color. Data were weighted by institution to account for substantial differences in the number of respondents at each of the 9 colleges.

Although we were not able to check for non-response bias, a comparison of our results to previously reported voting patterns among community college students indicated that students in our sample voted at rates similar to the national average (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012). Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that survey administrations with low response rates can still provide reliable estimates of college student behavior (Fosnacht, et al, 2013; Hutchison, Tollefson, & Wigington, 1987; Pike, 2012). Indeed, using data from online-only National Survey of Student Engagement administrations between 2010 and 2012 that achieved response rates above 50%, Fosnacht and his colleagues (2013) simulated various (lower) response rates, comparing the sample means for the simulated rates with the full sample means. They found that for surveys sent to 1,000 or more students, the correlation between the simulated sample mean and the full sample mean ranged from .93 and .97; in other words, that “low response rate administrations can provide reliable survey estimates” (p. 12).

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis occurred in three stages. First, we performed descriptive and demographic cross-tab analyses of the survey data in order to capture a preliminary snapshot of students’ levels of civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge. We then conducted a factor analysis,



identifying 4 factors that explain most of the variance observed in questions related to students' civic outcomes. The 4 dependent variables in our analysis are:

- *Civic Agency* ( $\alpha = .86$ ; View of self as: part of campus or larger community; an individual who can have an impact on what happens in this country; having something to offer the world; someone who can speak out for themselves and others. After college will: work with others to promote social or political change; demonstrate leadership in the community or workplace; help others who may not be as well off.)
- *Civic Knowledge* ( $\alpha = .90$ ; Self-reported gains in understanding of global, national, and community issues.)
- *Civic Capacity* ( $\alpha = .86$ ; Ability to: have a civic conversation about controversial issues; have views challenged by others; work with others; voice opinions; understand people from other cultures, races, or ethnicities; and be part of something bigger than oneself to effect change. Have the tools necessary to: develop an informed position on a social or political issue; communicate with someone whose beliefs are different than one's own. Belief that involvement in community or campus causes is important.)
- *Civic Behavior* ( $\alpha = .90$ ; Expressing opinions on issues via social media or the Internet; participating in a campaign; raising awareness about an issue, party, or group; persuading others to vote for a particular candidate or party; discussing politics, social, or community issues; signing an online or paper petition; raising money for an issue, party, or group; joining organizations; holding leadership roles; making speeches or presentations; volunteering; service-learning; and recruiting others to participate in a community or civic activity.)

Questions related to voting (in student, local, state, and/or national elections) or registering to vote were not included in any of the dependent variables for two reasons. First, although more students voted in student elections while in college than did in high school, the percentages of students reporting that they registered or voted in a local, state, or national election while in college were very similar to the percentages stating that they did so prior to college (i.e., there was little variance between the pre- and post-test measures). Although this runs counter to literature showing that community college students are more likely than high school students to register or vote (Lopez & Brown, 2006; Marcelo, 2007; Newell, 2014), the fact that the last presidential election was in 2012—when the majority of survey respondents were still in high school—may have influenced our results. The second reason electoral participation was not included as a dependent variable is because voting behavior is only one way—and, arguably, a relatively *easy* way—for students to be civically engaged (Ulsaner & Brown, 2003). Indeed, scholars now believe that other forms of civic involvement (such as participation in deliberative dialogues or partnering with others in the community to address a mutually-identified issue) are much more transformative in nature and more likely to create active citizens who are skilled in democratic processes and knowledgeable about the policy issues confronting their communities (Mathews, forthcoming in 2016; McCartney, Bennion, & Simpson, 2013; Ronan, 2011). Following this literature, questions related to voting or registering to vote were included in our analysis only as independent variables.

Other independent variables included a factor related to civic behavior *prior to entering college* as well as 4 composite measures comprised of related questions from the Institutional Questionnaire (institutional intentionality around civic engagement, academic focus on civic

engagement, co-curricular focus on civic engagement, and civic engagement in faculty professional development and tenure/advancement policies).

The final step in our analysis was to run regressions on each of the 4 dependent variables in order to identify the individual and institutional factors associated with greater civic outcomes. Each regression utilized a step-wise technique, allowing students' pre-college behaviors to enter the model first, followed by student characteristics, college characteristics, and finally, student behaviors while in college. This process holds constant all of the variables that have already entered the model, allowing us to assess how much each additional variable contributes to the percentage of variance that can be explained by the analysis (Astin, 2002).

### **Descriptive Results**

Descriptive results of the civic outcomes survey show that community college students are reasonably engaged in civic behaviors, although the percentage of students participating in a given activity is inversely related to the amount of time or energy that activity requires. For example, 76% of respondents indicated that they obtained news daily or weekly; 74% voted in a student election; 62% discussed politics at least monthly; 43% expressed their opinions on issues or politics via social media or the Internet at least monthly; and 56% voted in a federal, state, or local election since entering college, all activities that require minimal amounts of time and energy. In contrast, on a monthly basis, only 24% had raised awareness about an issue, party, or group; 22% had recruited others to participate in a civic or community activity; 13% had raised money for an issue, party or group; and 10% had participated in a local, state, or national campaign. Although smaller numbers of students engaged in these time- and energy-consuming

activities, a comparison of the percent of students engaging in civic behaviors while in college and prior to college shows an uptick in engagement during the college years (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

Attending college also appears to influence students' civic agency and civic capacity. For example, 65% of respondents stated that their college experience somewhat or to a great extent contributed to their ability to have a civil conversation about controversial issues with someone whose background or views are different than their own; 63% stated that it contributed to their ability to have their views challenged by others; 56% stated that it contributed to their ability to voice their opinion on campus, at work, or in the community; and 53% stated that their college experience contributed to their ability to work with others to make a difference. As well, 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they can speak out for themselves and others; 77% agreed or strongly agreed that they can be part of something larger than themselves to effect change; 67% believed that they have the tools to seek out information in order to develop an informed position on a social or political issue; and 63% saw themselves as part of a community outside the college.

### **Predictive Results of the Civic Outcomes Survey**

Although we are most concerned with the environmental variables leading to civic outcomes—in other words, those characteristics and behaviors over which community colleges have at least some control—it is worth mentioning a few individual predictors of civic outcomes.

#### ***Individual Predictors of Community College Civic Outcomes***

Controlling for students' pre-college civic behaviors, our analyses indicated that race and ethnicity are significantly associated with civic outcomes, although the effects of race on the 4 dependent variables differed substantially (see Table 2). For example, Latinos and African Americans are more likely than Whites to demonstrate higher levels of Civic Capacity, Civic Agency, and Civic Knowledge. However, Latinos and African Americans, as well as Asians (including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders), are *less* likely than Whites to engage in Civic Behavior. In addition, Asian students are less likely than Whites to exhibit Civic Agency. Bi- or Multi-Racial students, on the other hand, are more likely than Whites to demonstrate higher levels of Civic Knowledge. Given that people of color have been historically marginalized from both education and political systems in America, these findings—which indicate that non-White students demonstrate higher levels of certain civic outcomes—are encouraging.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

Other demographic variables also influence students' civic outcomes. For example, although female students are more likely than males to exhibit higher levels of Civic Capacity, they are less likely to demonstrate Civic Behavior, Civic Agency, and Civic Knowledge. This finding dovetails with a report from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (Jenkins, 2005) showing that young women are more likely than men to be politically inattentive, which may speak to lower levels of Civic Knowledge and Civic Agency. As well, young women are “more likely to believe in the importance of individual efforts to improve society” (p. 11), such as volunteering and caring for family and friends; these individual approaches may not be captured sufficiently in our Civic Behavior factor.

Speaking English at home is positively associated with Civic Behavior, but inversely related to Civic Agency and Civic Knowledge (perhaps because native English speakers enter

college with a higher level of civic understanding than those from immigrant families). In addition, age is positively associated with Civic Behavior and Civic Agency, and full-time enrollment contributes to higher levels of Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge but is inversely related to Civic Behavior (likely because full-time students have less time to engage in civic activities). Interestingly, parental education and income are both negatively associated with Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge, and parental income is also inversely related to Civic Behavior. These results indicate that students from less-well educated and lower income families are more likely than their peers to demonstrate multiple civic outcomes after at least one year of community college attendance.

### ***Institutional and Behavioral Predictors of Community College Civic Outcomes***

In order to determine how much influence community colleges have on students' civic outcomes, we first compared the intermediate  $R^2$  values (the percentage of variance in each dependent variable accounted for by students' pre-college behaviors and demographics) with the  $R^2$  after all variables were taken into account. As Table 3 shows, intermediate  $R^2$  values ranged from .09 to .45. After the environmental variables (college characteristics and college student behaviors) entered the models, final  $R^2$  values ranged from .21 to .59, with those dependent variables that are easier to quantify (specifically, Civic Behavior and Civic Capacity) falling on the higher end of the range. What is clear from this comparison is that community colleges have a substantial ability to influence students' civic outcomes. Indeed, college characteristics and college student behaviors account for the majority of the total  $R^2$  for Civic Capacity (71%), Civic Knowledge (68%), and Civic Agency (52%). Furthermore, environmental factors explain almost a quarter

(24%) of students' Civic Behavior, even though this type of involvement may be only loosely tied to students' educational goals and experiences.

[Insert Table 3 about Here]

### *College Characteristics*

In addition to examining the total amount of variance that can be explained by environmental variables, we also identified the specific college characteristics that lead to greater civic outcomes (see Table 3). Our analysis shows that larger community colleges—as measured by FTE students—as well as those with higher proportions of students over the age of 24 are negatively associated with Civic Agency, Civic Knowledge, and Civic Behavior. However, colleges with greater proportions of students receiving Pell grants (a proxy for low-income status) demonstrate higher levels of Civic Agency, perhaps because these institutions may be particularly active in working to remedy the social and educational effects of income inequality.

Perhaps more important to college leaders—because it is something they can influence—institutional intentionality toward civic engagement (civic engagement mentioned in mission or strategic plan, a dedicated budget allocation for civic learning, a center for civic engagement on campus, etc.) contributes to higher levels of Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. This finding indicates that by making visible and meaningful institutional commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement, community colleges can do much to improve their students' civic outcomes. However, results related to a college's academic focus on civic engagement, as well as whether and how institutions incorporate civic engagement into their professional development programs or their faculty tenure/advancement policies, are not as clear. Indeed, academic focus on civic engagement positively contributes to Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, and Civic Knowledge but is negatively associated with Civic Agency. Similarly,

civic engagement in faculty professional development and tenure/advancement policies is associated with greater Civic Behavior, but negatively contributes to Civic Agency and Civic Capacity. While the positive connections between these institutional variables and Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, and Civic Knowledge are logical, more investigation is required to understand the negative association with Civic Agency and, in the case of faculty development and tenure, Civic Capacity.<sup>2</sup>

### *College Student Behaviors*

While college-wide support for civic engagement may be important, it is clear from our analyses that specific student behaviors while in college may be the strongest predictors of civic outcomes (see Table 3). For example, traditional measures of academic engagement such as studying or preparing for class, interacting with a professor, and acting as a tutor or mentor are almost always positively and (relatively) strongly associated with greater civic outcomes. The two exceptions to this are a negative association between studying or preparing for class and Civic Behavior, which makes sense in light of students' time commitments; and an inverse relationship between acting as a tutor or mentor and Civic Knowledge, which may be explained by the fact that these students had higher levels of civic understanding prior to enrolling in college.

However, several other academic and co-curricular variables are even stronger predictors of students' civic outcomes than the traditional academic measures. For example, participating in a racial or ethnic organization contributes to all 4 outcomes, especially Civic Behavior and Civic Capacity. Similarly, taking a course dealing with social, political, or economic inequality contributes to all of the outcomes, especially Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. Taking a political science or government course is also associated with all 4 civic outcomes, although the

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<sup>2</sup> A fourth composite variable taken from the institutional questionnaire filled out by college representatives—co-curricular focus on civic engagement—was removed from the final models to resolve issues of multi-collinearity.



effect sizes are relatively smaller. What accounts for the strong associations between these academic and co-curricular experiences and students' civic outcomes? Perhaps these courses and racial/ethnic organizations provide structured opportunities for political behavior and/or exposure to various civic and democratic modes of engagement. Yet they may also attract students who are already civically engaged and who see these experiences as a way of becoming more involved. Regardless, these findings provide support for institutions, such as Kingsborough Community College in Bronx, New York (McMath Turner, forthcoming in 2016), that require all students to take a course or participate in a co-curricular activity related to civic engagement in order to graduate.

Working while in college also appears to influence students' civic outcomes, although the direction of this association depends on whether students work on- or off-campus. Specifically, the more hours students work on-campus (which is typically capped at 20), the more likely they are to demonstrate higher levels of Civic Capacity and Civic Agency. However, the more they work *off*-campus—where there are no limits to the number of hours worked—the less likely they are to exhibit Civic Capacity, Civic Agency, or Civic Knowledge, most likely because students' efforts are focused elsewhere. This finding has clear implications for how community colleges work to provide and encourage on-campus employment for students.

Results related to attending a religious service are less clear. Indeed, this behavior is positively associated with Civic Behavior and Civic Agency—which is logical given the high priority many religious organizations place on activism—but inversely related to Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. More study is required to better understand this finding and its implications.

Finally, college student behaviors related to political engagement—including obtaining news regularly, registering to vote, voting in a student election, and voting in a local, state, or national election—are also, for the most part, positively associated with greater Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, Civic Agency, and Civic Knowledge. This reinforces scholarly perceptions that electoral participation can function as a gateway to more substantive forms of civic and democratic engagement (Mathews, forthcoming in 2016; McCartney, Bennion, & Simpson, 2013; Ronan, 2011). Obtaining news regularly has a particularly strong association with greater Civic Capacity, which indicates that the more students seek to understand the world in which they live, the more likely they are to feel that they have the tools necessary to participate in a meaningful way. However, obtaining news regularly also has a small but significant *negative* association with Civic Behavior, which may be a function of students' busy lives. Interestingly, we also found small but significant negative associations between voting in a local, state, or national election and students' Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. While this finding deserves more study, it may be influenced by the very low voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds in the November 2014 election, the only one that occurred while all of our respondents were in college (New York Times, 2014).

Taken together, these results indicate that student behaviors in college, both in the curriculum and the extra-curriculum, as well as certain college characteristics such as institutional intentionality toward civic engagement, have powerful implications for the development of students' civic outcomes. Furthermore, this study suggests that those programs and practices which are intended to develop students' civic learning and democratic engagement—such as courses focused on inequality, racial/ethnic organizations, student elections, and so forth—are effective in doing so. Thus, the more community colleges work to

establish policies and programs that encourage these behaviors, the more likely it is that their students will display the civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in a democratic society.

## **Discussion and Implications**

In the twenty-first century, simply admitting all comers—democratizing opportunity—is not sufficient to remedy the social inequities of our society; community colleges must also help students develop the civic skills necessary to work toward positive change, both in their communities and in our nation as a whole. The results of this national pilot provide preliminary yet meaningful information about community college students' civic outcomes, both in terms of the ways in which students engage and substantial amount of influence community colleges appear to have over students' civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge. These results add much to the nascent scholarly literature on community college civic outcomes, but perhaps most importantly, they provide support for the myriad ways community colleges across the country—especially those associated with The Democracy Commitment—are working to encourage civic and democratic engagement on their campuses.

However, as with most pilot studies, there are several inherent limitations, including those related to response rates and an overrepresentation of certain groups among respondents. Furthermore, although the sample was weighted to compensate for the fact that some colleges produced many more respondents than others, results related to college characteristics must be interpreted with some caution due to the small number of participating institutions. Many of these limitations will be addressed in future administrations of the survey, which will include a larger sample of TDC colleges and a greater number of respondents. This will not only introduce

more variability into our analyses, but will also allow us to utilize smaller random samples and more aggressive follow-up procedures. Furthermore, future administrations of the civic outcomes survey in presidential election years—when voter turnout is typically much higher—will allow for a better understanding of the individual and institutional factors leading to greater electoral participation, as well as the relationship between voting and other civic outcomes.

Finally, although we found that college student behaviors are powerfully associated with civic outcomes—a finding that provides community colleges with much practical information about how they might work to improve civic outcomes—there exists a chicken-and-egg problem in interpreting the results, especially for those dependent variables for which there is no pre-test. For example, does participating in a racial or ethnic organization lead to greater Civic Capacity? Or does a strong sense of Civic Capacity drive students to join these types of organizations? A plausible argument can be made that students' behaviors lead to changes in the way they view themselves and their capacity to communicate with others and effect change (after all, this assumption underlies many tenets of teaching and learning, not to mention the field of behavioral psychology), but we cannot know this for sure.

Despite its limitations, the results of this study indicate that community colleges can and do play an important role in shaping students' civic lives. By making visible and measurable commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement on campus, and by creating opportunities for students to interact with one another, wrestle with thorny social or political issues, and engage in their communities, colleges can help create informed citizens who are skilled in democratic practices and committed to lifelong engagement. As the project matures, survey data will also be examined for its relationship to more traditional academic outcomes such as grade point averages and persistence and graduation rates. Such analyses will not only

allow us to assess how an institutional focus on civic engagement leads to improved civic outcomes, but also how it may contribute to students' ability to succeed in college and beyond. Ultimately, connecting civic learning and democratic engagement to the academic and workforce outcomes valued by policymakers may be a necessary step in helping community colleges not only democratize opportunity, but *do the work of democracy*.

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**Table 1: Percent of Students Engaging in Civic Behaviors in College and Prior to College**

	<b>In College</b>	<b>Prior to College</b>
Obtained news at least weekly	76	76
Voted in student election	74	59
Discussed politics, social, or community issues at least monthly	62	63
Voted in a local, state, or national election	56	57
Registered to vote	48	45
Participated in a group or organization at least monthly	44	45
Expressed opinions via social media or the Internet at least monthly	43	39
Made a speech or presentation at least monthly	41	31
Volunteered at least monthly	35	37
Performed a leadership role in an organization at least monthly	29	31
Engaged in service learning at least monthly	28	24
Raised awareness about an issue, party, or group at least monthly	24	21
Recruited others to participate in a community or civic activity at least monthly	22	20
Signed an online or paper petition at least monthly	20	17
Raised money for an issue, party, or group at least monthly	13	13
Persuaded others to vote for a particular issue, candidate, or party at least monthly	12	9
Participated in a local, state, or national campaign at least monthly	10	7

**Table 2. Individual Predictors of Community College Civic Outcomes**

	Civic Agency	Civic Knowledge	Civic Capacity	Civic Behavior
Weighted N=	21,822	22,035	21,462	21,127
<b>Pre-College Behaviors</b>	<b>Final Betas</b>			
Civic Behavior	0.14 ***	0.04 ***	0.08 ***	0.48 ***
<b>Intermediate R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.43</b>
<b>Student Characteristics</b>	<b>Final Betas</b>			
Race: African American	0.11 ***	0.10 ***	0.07 ***	-0.05 ***
Race: Latino	0.06 ***	0.08 ***	0.06 ***	-0.03 ***
Race: Asian-NH-PI	-0.03 ***			-0.04 ***
Race: Bi- or Multi-Racial		0.05 ***		
Gender: Female	-0.01 *	-0.02 **	0.07 ***	-0.03 ***
Age	0.09 ***			0.06 ***
Enrollment Status: Full-Time		0.03 ***	0.02 **	-0.01 *
Speak English at Home	-0.04 ***	-0.10 ***		0.03 ***
Parent Education		-0.05 ***	-0.03 ***	
Parent Income		-0.06 ***	-0.06 ***	-0.07 ***
<b>Intermediate R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.45</b>

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

Note: Only Betas that remained significant in the final models are shown here.

**Table 3. Institutional and Behavioral Predictors of Community College Civic Outcomes**

	Civic Agency	Civic Knowledge	Civic Capacity	Civic Behavior
Weighted N=	21,822	22,322	21,462	20,882
<b>R<sup>2</sup> after Pre-College Behaviors and Student Characteristics</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.45</b>
<b>College Characteristics</b>	<b>Final Betas</b>			
Total FTE	-0.03 ***	-0.03 ***		-0.03 ***
Percent of Students over 24		-0.02 *		-0.03 ***
Percent of Students on Pell	0.03 **			
Institutional Intentionality around Civic Engagement		0.08 ***	0.04 ***	0.06 ***
Academic Focus on Civic Engagement	-0.03 ***	0.01 *	0.02 **	0.03 ***
Civic Engagement in Faculty Professional Development & Tenure	-0.04 ***		-0.02 *	0.01 ***
<b>In-College Behaviors</b>	<b>Final Betas</b>			
Number of Credits Completed	-0.02 ***	0.06 ***	0.03 ***	
Acted as Tutor or Mentor	0.11 ***	-0.06 ***	0.12 ***	0.13 ***
Interacted with a Professor	0.04 ***	0.11 ***	0.12 ***	0.10 ***
Studied or Prepared for Class	0.14 ***	0.09 ***	0.10 ***	-0.05 ***
Participated in a Racial/Ethnic Organization	0.08 ***	0.12 ***	0.17 ***	0.23 ***
Taken a Course Dealing with Social, Political, or Economic Inequality	0.08 ***	0.26 ***	0.19 ***	0.08 **
Taken a Political Science or Government Class	0.07 ***	0.06 ***	0.07 ***	0.06 ***
Hours/Week Work for Pay On-Campus	0.03 ***		0.03 ***	
Hours/Week Work for Pay Off-Campus	-0.04 ***	-0.04 ***	-0.07 ***	-0.04 ***
Attended a Religious Service	0.05 ***	-0.02 **	-0.05 ***	0.03 ***
Obtain News	0.06 ***	0.09 ***	0.13 ***	-0.02 **
Registered to Vote	0.02 **	0.05 ***	0.06 ***	0.04 ***
Voted in Student Election	0.03 ***	0.09 ***	0.07 ***	0.06 ***
Voted in Local, State, or National Election		-0.02 *	-0.06 ***	0.03 ***
<b>Final R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>0.59</b>

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

Note: Only Betas that remained significant in the final models are shown here.