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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS: A  
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE CURRICULUM AND  
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Teaching and Learning  
in the College of Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
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2012

Major Professor: William B. Russell

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## **ABSTRACT**

Social scientists claim young United States (U.S.) citizens have become disengaged in civic life which jeopardizes democracy (White et al., 2007; CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p.8). As a nation, the U.S. has failed to teach students the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for democratic life (White et l., 2007). Social scientists claim young U.S. citizens have become disengaged in civic life since the 1980s (Colby, 2007; CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p.4). Compared to past generations, young citizens in the United States are less engaged in political life and lack an understanding of what it means to be an active and engaged citizen (Colby, 2007; White et al., 2007; CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p.4). The idea of engaged citizenship has become narrowly defined as the simple act of voting, limiting the possibilities of citizens in improving society through community involvement (White et al., 2007).

However, social scientists and social science educators have witnessed an increase in volunteerism of young U.S. citizens since about 2000. Along with this increase in volunteerism, other empirical evidence has painted a more positive picture of young Americans' civic engagement (Zukin et al., 2006). While researchers admit that young U.S. citizens are less politically engaged, young citizens demonstrate an interest in civic engagement (e.g., volunteering and participating in social campaigns) (Zukin et al., 2006).

Historically, kindergarten through twelfth-grade (K-12) social-studies education has responded, through a civic-focused curriculum, to the needs of the United States. The nation's colleges and universities have also traditionally focused on the education of the country's future civic leaders, paying particular attention to teaching citizenship for the common good while

promoting civic duty and responsibility. In comparison, little attention has been focused on the civic education of the community college student. The primary focus of community colleges has been to stimulate local economies and provide training for workforce development. In addition to workforce development, community colleges have provided access to under-prepared students who are interested in completing a four-year degree at a university, where civic leadership has been integrated into the curriculum.

This research study followed a qualitative phenomenological approach that investigated the attitudes and perceptions of community college students and their civic and political engagement. The researcher collected data pertaining to civic engagement from three sources: open-ended qualitative questionnaires, student focus-groups, and a drawing activity completed by students. This research study was conducted in a large urban community college located in the southeastern region of the United States. Wilson Community College is a pseudonym used to conceal the identity of the college that was used in this research study.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction to the Study**

In 2003, the Carnegie Foundation and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) published an article titled “The Civic Mission of Schools.” The document expressed a growing concern over the recent trend that young United States (U.S.) citizens are disengaged from civic life. The report cited, “In recent decades...increasing numbers of Americans have disengaged from civic and political institutions such as voluntary associations, religious congregations, community-based organizations, and political and electoral activities such as voting and being informed about public issues” (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 8). These claims are based on voting behaviors of young U.S. citizens, their lack of “interest in political discussions and public issues,” their general lack of understanding democratic systems, and their distrust of government (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003). As a result of this disengagement, young U.S. citizens do not possess the skills necessary to be democratically involved in society (White, Van Scotter, Hartoonian, & Davis, 2007). In addition, this disengagement leads to an uninformed electorate and a decrease in civic participation.

Thomas Ehrlich describes civic engagement as “...working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills and values, and motivation to make a difference” (2000). Civic engagement means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes (Ehrlich, 2000). This definition helps to underline the complex nature of civic engagement, which should not be



defined as the single act of voting, but rather by a much wider scope that includes volunteerism, awareness of global issues, etc. The idea of civic engagement is rather conceptual and dynamic.

While traditional definitions of civic engagement focus on social efficiency, this dissertation aims to discuss a more contemporary view of civic engagement, one that includes knowledge of current public issues, encourages volunteerism, and prepares citizens for life in a global economy. Being civically engaged includes working within the local community to solve problems; attending local government meetings; knowing social and political issues at the local, regional, and national level; understanding the role individuals play in society; and answering the call to be civically active. To achieve this contemporary sense of civic engagement, students must acquire civic knowledge (content knowledge), develop civic skills (e.g., critical thinking), reflect interpersonally, engage in civic dialogue, and find motivation to participate in society (Hatcher, 2011).

Most research in the area of civic engagement focuses on the impact that civic education programs have on K-12 students and their future participation in society beyond the classroom. However, an aspect of civic education that is frequently overlooked is the opportunity for post-secondary-level educators to teach and reinforce civic engagement within their classroom and through assignments. Civic engagement is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon, which provides college students with multiple opportunities to participate in their community (Hatcher, 2011). This phenomenon varies from institution to institution and is dependent on the campus climate, administrative support, student leadership, and the surrounding community (Hatcher, 2011). Hatcher argues that an institutional assessment plan should collect “systemic data” to

better understand the impact civic-engagement programs have on student civic-participation. Hatcher supports the claims made by Colby and the Carnegie Foundation that colleges and universities have the opportunity and ability to influence the civic engagement of students within the community through the work of faculty, students, and administrators (2011).

The Carnegie Foundation and CIRCLE report argues that the social-studies classroom is the best place for young United States citizens to learn civic responsibility. A passage from the executive summary states:

Recognizing that individuals do not automatically become free and responsible citizens but must be educated for citizenship, scholars teachers civic leaders local, state and federal policy makers: and federal judges, have with the encouragement of the president of the United States, called for the new strategies that can capitalize on young people's idealism and their commitment to service and volunteerism while addressing their disengagement from political and civic institutions. One of the most promising approaches to increase young people's informed engagement is school-based civic education (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 4).

The report also states that civic education should "...help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives" (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p.4). The report argues that students should become informed and thoughtful and develop a "...grasp and an appreciation of the history and fundamental processes of American democracy" (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003). Students should "...participate in their communities through membership..." and join

organizations that work toward improving the "...cultural, social, political and religious interests..." of the community (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003). Students should develop skills to enable them to "...act politically, and gain skills and knowledge..." to work in groups to solve problems in society. Finally, students should acquire the moral and civic virtues necessary for civic life, which include "...social responsibility, tolerance and respect..." (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003).

The Carnegie Foundation believes that schools are the only social institution with the ability to systematically teach the skills necessary to instill in students the social and democratic norms important to the United States' democracy (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 4). The report pointed out the historical focus of the United States' educational system as the "...impetus for originally establishing public schools..." to achieve an informed and prepared citizenry and how teaching and developing citizens remains a primary focus of state-funded education in school districts (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 5). While other social institutions (such as volunteer organizations, political parties, and other special interest groups) may have temporarily held the attention of citizens and encouraged their participation in social affairs and the democratic systems, schools have remained a constant influence in developing citizens (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003).

In a 2007 report published by the Carnegie Foundation, Anne Colby challenges higher education to reconsider its role in developing citizenship participation of young U.S. citizens. Colby cites research conducted by the Carnegie Foundation that provides an explanation for the recent trend in behaviors of young United States citizens in which college students are more

likely to volunteer than participate in politics (2007). Colby's findings support other research that students are willing to volunteer because they observe the "reliable and immediate" effects that their volunteering has on individuals. For the purposes of this study, volunteering is defined as "work completed by an individual for an organization with a primary purpose to provide service to the community without compensation." Colby argues that the rewards for volunteering outweigh the rewards of political participation. Students expressed general distrust of elected officials and the political process; in addition, students did not see the connection between their daily life and politics (Colby, 2007). This research supports the observation that young U.S. citizens are "...more likely to be involved in volunteer work of an apolitical sort, rather than in politics (Colby, 2007, p. 1).

Colby points out the possible cause for this shift in student engagement. Students today are encouraged, and in some situations required, to complete volunteer hours for admission to college (2007). Additionally, colleges and universities continue to incorporate service learning into their curriculum and course outlines, significantly impacting student volunteerism (Colby, 2007). As the level of student volunteerism increases, Colby argues that "...youth political engagement is ripe for the same kind of success story if educators..." provide similar "...opportunities and incentives..." to students who participate in politics (Colby, 2007, p. 2). Colby further states that students' political development will yield significant gains and will ensure the success of the democracy if educators commit the same level of attention to developing extracurricular activities and curriculum that focus on developing political skills and

knowledge of students. Colby states that political engagement will have significant gains, especially with those "...who are least interested in politics" (Colby, 2007, p. 2).

## Definitions of Terms

Citizenship education is a broad term used to describe curriculum, or extra-curricular activities, aimed at teaching skills, content knowledge, and an appreciation for civic responsibility in a democratic society and is focused on developing characteristics important to becoming an active citizen. For the purposes of this research study, civic education will be used interchangeably with citizenship education and is defined as curriculum, or extra-curricular activities, aimed at teaching skills, content knowledge, and an appreciation for civic responsibility in a democratic society and is focused on developing characteristics important to becoming an active citizen.

Activities, known as civic engagement, include any activity "...aimed at achieving a public good...through direct hands-on work in cooperation with others, e.g., volunteering for a church or non-profit organization" (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli-Carpini, 2006). A second closely related term is political engagement. Political engagement is the act of "...influencing government policy or affecting the selection of public officials" (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli-Carpini, 2006).

A post-secondary institution is defined as any educational organization that provides training or instruction for students after K-12 public or private education. This includes public and private colleges, universities, community colleges, vocational/trade schools, and academies. This study is specifically focused on civic engagement at the community college, which is defined as an open-door, state-funded institution, evolved from a local school district to satisfy the needs of a local community, that provides two-year workforce programs and two-year programs designed for a student's transfer to a university. Community colleges frequently

provide adult education, vocational training, and continuing-education programs to the community. State colleges are state-funded institutions that have transitioned from a community college to a four-year degree-granting institution.

### Theoretical Framework

Citizenship education, or civic education, is a term commonly used by social-studies educators, historians, and scholars to describe a curriculum focused on preparing students to become active and engaged citizens. To ensure the health of a democratic society, citizens must learn through experiences with social institutions the value of civic engagement and be equipped with skills to effectively contribute to the governance of the society. In a 2005 article, Chiodo and Martin outline the calling for the social-studies classroom to “...help our students... understand that their participation in our democratic system of government is vital to our future existence as a nation” (p. 23). Additionally, citizens must be more than patriotic and learn how to place the common good of society before their desires (Chiodo & Martin, 2005). Chiodo and Martin assert an important distinction in understanding citizenship engagement. Citizenship is a “...dual nature, social and political...” phenomenon (p. 24). Students must learn how they interact socially, in a sort of interpersonal way, with other citizens in an effective and civil manner as well as how they act politically with the government and the political system (Chiodo & Martin, 2005). Both the social and political aspects of citizenship must be developed to ensure socially-efficient students and future democratically-minded individuals (Chiodo & Martin, 2005). This idea that civic engagement encompasses both civic and political engagement has emerged from more contemporary research in civic education (Chiodo & Martin, 2005; Zukin et

al., 2006). Since 2001, the idea that civic engagement is both political and non-political has revised the way researchers define engagement and how research is conducted.

### The Problem

Becoming a democratically-minded individual is not a natural instinct for a young person and requires a systematic approach from dedicated social institutions and individuals, i.e., teachers, coaches, mentors, and parents (Carnegie, 2003). Since the 1880s, formal attempts have been made by educators, politicians, school administrators, and scholars to define and describe citizenship education; reinforce the notion that citizenship should be taught in the classroom; and seek the best practices for students to acquire these skills (Evans, 2008).

In the foreword of *Education for Citizenship: Ideas and Innovations in Political Learning*, edited by Grant Reeher and Joseph Cammarano, Benjamin Barber discusses the importance of teaching citizenship. Barber's argument contrasts the typical argument made by social-studies teachers and scholars. Frequently, citizenship-education programs are focused on the negative impact on the individual if civics is not taught in school curriculum. Instead, Barber's argument focuses on the impact on an entire nation if citizens are not taught civic responsibility. While much of the literature is focused on how an individual is affected by the lack of civic ability, Barber is focused on the big picture: the effects and impact on society if a population is socially ineffective. Barber argues the retributions of not providing citizenship education is witnessed through individual behaviors such as lack of interest in current events, low voter-turnout, distrust in government, and the idea that the government is wasteful and inefficient (1997). Barber's primary argument is that if enough citizens are not socially efficient



or engaged, greater systemic issues within the democratic society will exist that could lead to a failing democracy (1997).

This research study contributes to the current body of knowledge regarding civic education and paid specific attention to how colleges should be considered significant partners in teaching civics. The community college plays an important and significant role in teaching young United States citizens. U.S. community colleges are positioned to provide meaningful change and influence to their service districts as they provide open-door access to post-secondary education. This study provides community-college educators with a better understanding of how the college experience, both through curriculum and extracurricular activities, impacts student civic-engagement, which will make a meaningful difference in programs and curriculum development. The United States' founding fathers knew education was a critical component in the development of citizens and that educated citizens meant engaged citizens (White et al., 2007). This study provides more data on how schools help shape the future of democratic citizens.

#### Research Questions

This research study employed a qualitative-research method (open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, and drawing activity) to better understand the impact the community-college curriculum has on student civic-engagement. Specifically, the research study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do Wilson Community College students define civic engagement?

2. How are Wilson Community College students civically engaged on campus and in the community?
3. How has the Wilson Community coursework (curriculum) affected students' attitudes and perceptions about civic engagement during a student's two-year program?
4. How does the Wilson Community curriculum affect the students' level of civic engagement?

#### Purpose of the Study

This research study provides a better understanding of civic engagement among college students enrolled at Wilson Community College, an open-door institution located in the southeastern region of the United States. Through questionnaires, focus-group discussions, and data collected from drawing samples, data were analyzed to better understand the relationship between the community-college curriculum and students' civic engagement. Specifically, student questionnaires, focus groups' conversations, and drawing samples provide a better understanding of how students define civic engagement, their perceived level of engagement, and how the college curriculum influences their level of civic engagement. Participants in this study were asked what types of activities they are involved in and how the college experience has influenced this involvement. Additionally, students were asked about their future involvement and how this has been influenced by their community-college education. From the data, the researcher has made connections between findings in this research study and prior research studies in the area of civic education. This study provides a better understanding of the

relationship between the student learning-experience at the community college and its impact on a student's civic-engagement. Finally, this study supports the assertion that the college experience influences students' civic engagement and can provide meaningful opportunities to improve civic engagement through the college coursework at a systemic level.

While community colleges have the potential to provide civic education to the masses, most of the research in the area of civic education has focused on the K-12 and university system. The role public K-12 classrooms and the university have played in developing young citizens can be traced back to the 1880s. The birth of the community-college system occurred much later in United States' history, around the 1930s. When discussing the history of civic education, the literature lacks any mention as to how the community college plays a significant role in citizenship education. In other words, the importance of community colleges in providing democratic education has long been overlooked. This research study draws attention to how the community college can make a significant and meaningful impact on democratic life in United States.

The community-college classroom provides an opportunity to teach students from a much more diverse background. Historically, the community college has evolved from the K-12 school district to provide adult education and vocational training in areas that did not offer direct access to higher education by way of public or private post-secondary education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). The evolution of the community college has allowed students who would otherwise be ineligible to study at traditional colleges and universities to attend college. As a result of the community college, access to post-secondary training is now available to students

with below college-level skills in reading, writing, and math and students who are ethnic minorities or from lower socio-economic classes (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Because community colleges provide higher education to minority students and students with varying academic backgrounds, this previously overlooked population now has the opportunity to be exposed to post-secondary-level civic education.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Citizenship Education

*The Civic Mission of Schools* (2003) report argues, despite a “...shared vision of democracy...”, the nation has experienced in recent decades a general lack of engagement of young United States citizens in the democratic process (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 8). Evidence cited in the report includes low voter-turnout, a decrease in young people volunteering in political causes and faith-associated programs, and a lack of student understanding of public issues in comparison to past generations. This underlines the serious concern that the United States is not preparing students for democratic life (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003). The report argues that United States youth should develop “...skills, knowledge and attitudes which will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives” (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 4). The report describes competent citizens as “...informed and thoughtful...” with an understanding and appreciation of history and democracy (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003, p. 4). Responsible citizens would demonstrate moral and civic virtues such as the concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance, respect, and a belief in the capacity to make a difference (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003).

In “The Problem: Democracy at Risk,” White, Scotter, Hartoonian, and Davis (2007) argue “the legitimacy of government is found in the individual.” While civic engagement is commonly simplified to the act of voting, voting is only a part of a much larger, more complex idea of civic engagement that will ensure the longevity of the United States’ republic (White et al., 2007, p. 228). In order to teach this, students must “first embrace the idea that the legitimacy

of government is found in the individual” (White et al., 2007, p. 228). Furthermore, people must believe they can govern themselves (White et al., 2007). The future of the United States is dependent on the participation of its youth; therefore, a democratic society cannot survive without preparing students for the role of citizenship. The nation’s founding fathers knew education was a critical component in the development of citizens and that educated citizens meant engaged citizens (White et al., 2007).

The pursuit of the common good is found throughout the literature when one researches citizenship education. This ideal, to teach students values and skills aimed at supporting a democracy, has been adopted by national organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies. The introduction of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) curriculum standards states:

To achieve the vision of social studies, we must ensure that students become intimately acquainted with scholarship, artisanship, leadership and citizenship.

Excellence in social studies will be achieved by programs in which students gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to understand, respect and practice the ways of the scholar, the artisan, the leader and the citizen in support of the common good (NCSS, 1992).

The notion of citizens acting for the common good of society is frequently found in the literature. During a speech at the *Conference on Civic Education* on December 5, 2004, Lee Hamilton connected the idea of civic actions for the common good of society with the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. During a conversation he had had with young

United States citizens, Hamilton was startled by the apathetic view shared by many young U.S. citizens that being a U.S. citizen was "...no big deal..." (2004). Hamilton warned conference attendees that this attitude was a concern for future civic health, as this would cause passiveness in civic traditions (2004). Hamilton cited occasions from United States' history when the virtue of civic responsibility was imperative to achieving governance for the common good and argued that desires of individual citizens and special interests prevent the United States from being great (2004). A system of narrow partisanship has prevented politicians from governing for the common good of society (Hamilton, 2004). Hamilton's words called for young U.S. citizens to be educated with the stories of past statesmen who placed the common good before their own personal gains (2004). He ended his speech with the following words to a group of teachers: "We should teach our students that being an American provides the opportunity to do something great: an opportunity, and a responsibility, unparalleled in human history—the opportunity, with each generation, to be part of a new birth of freedom" (2004, p. 142).

The National Council for the Social Studies has published numerous other position statements, along with national standards for teaching the social sciences. Among the list of twenty-four position statements published by NCSS, four position statements specifically address the area of civic efficacy, civic education, citizenship education, and service learning, which are all significant to this research study. Considered the primary authority for teaching social studies and one of the original practitioner-founded organizations in the United States, NCSS deserves attention and consideration when discussing topics related to civic education.

The presence of civic education in the NCSS position statement demonstrates the commitment to preparing students for civic life by way of teaching and learning in the social-studies classroom.

The NCSS Task Force on Revitalizing Citizenship Education affirmed the primary goal of public education as the preparation of engaged and effective citizens. NCSS defines an effective citizen as “...one who has the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to assume the office of citizen in our democratic republic” (2001). NCSS believes that to achieve this outcome, students must learn through their participation in a citizenship-education program. The foundation of any civic-education program should include content knowledge, the development of student-participation skills, and demonstration to students that, in a democracy, every citizen makes a difference (NCSS, 2001). The organization believes that students should graduate from their public school experience with a “...clear sense of responsibility...” and be prepared to “...challenge injustice and promote the common good...” of society (NCSS, 2001). These statements are commonly referenced in literature pertaining to civic education and provide guidance to the social-studies classrooms. This position statement provides a clear rationale for the civics classroom and has become the foundation for many curriculum and extra-curricular programs.

At the core of a sound civic-education program is the impact that the program has on the individual. To achieve citizenship focused on promoting the common good, social-studies teachers must develop curriculum and provide opportunities for students to develop good moral character and civic virtue. To address this, the National Council for the Social Studies has developed a position statement focused on character education. The council states this aspect of



civic education is “...often misunderstood and neglected...” in the civic-education curriculum. The council admits the process of character education is a complicated task (NCSS, 1996). To achieve good moral character, the council argues that schools should provide students with the “opportunity to make positive contributions to the well-being of fellow students and the school” (NCSS, 1996).

In a 2007 article by Anne Colby, Senior Scholar for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching titled “Educating for Democracy,” higher education is called on to help prepare students through citizenship and civic-education courses. In doing so, the foundation revealed some of the causes for students’ lack of interest in civic life and a dislike for politics. In surveys conducted by the Carnegie Foundation, students expressed distrust of politicians and the political process (Colby, 2007). Students also indicated doubt for how they can make a difference in politics. The article described an abundance of community-service opportunities offered by adults compared to the rare suggestion that students participate in service related to civic causes. The Foundation stated... “it may be that young people’s high levels of involvement in community service, but not politics, is less a story of their natural inclinations and choices and more a story of structures and opportunity and incentives provided by adults” (Colby, 2007, p. 2).

The NCSS and the Carnegie Foundation are regional and state-wide organizations focused on the study and development of civic-engagement projects. The Lou Frey Institute at the University of Central Florida and the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida have partnered to establish the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship. The center is

dedicated to measuring the civic health of Florida citizens and working within the Florida public school system to create programs aimed at promoting civic and political engagement in students and citizens of the state. In a conversation, Dr. Dobson from the Joint Center described the organization as “more of a do tank, and less a think tank” (2011). Members of the center are dedicated to creating and promoting civic engagement through programs in K-12 classrooms as well as through programs at universities to encourage civic leadership in college and university students.

Annually, the Joint Center for Citizenship publishes a report on the civic health of the state of Florida, comparing the engagement level of Florida to other populations. The 2010 report *A Tale of Two Cities: Civic Health of Miami and Minneapolis-St. Paul* provides a comprehensive comparison of the highest measured civically-engaged community in the United States, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, to the lowest civically-engaged, Miami, Florida. The report provides civic-health indicators that are culled from the Current Population Survey (CPS) supplemental questionnaires, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Statistical information on how frequently a person registers to vote, actually votes, volunteers, or engages in public affairs is included in the data. The data from the CPS explain the level of civic engagement and analyze the causes for the shortcomings of that engagement in the Miami community. This report supports the claim of the Joint Center that increasing citizenship engagement, currently at a relatively low level in Florida, should remain a primary concern at the state level. The Joint Center is committed to educating students to be engaged citizens of a democratic society.

Shirley H. Engle and Anna S. Ochoa (1998) in *Education for Democratic Citizenship: Decision Making in the Social Studies* argue that citizenship education is necessary for the democratic process. Engle and Ochoa begin the first chapter by citing a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to John Adams. In the letter, Jefferson discussed the multiple disagreements that had occurred between the gentlemen during the course of their political lives. Engle and Ochoa argue this type of discourse is necessary for democratic governance and demonstrates the democratic process at work through civic debate. Without a respectful and thoughtful discussion of issues, the democratic process cannot hope to improve society (Engle & Ochoa, 1998). Without civic debate, people cannot hope to understand the problems of a nation or begin to address them. The type of character and citizenship that should be taught in social-studies classroom is shown in this example (Engle & Ochoa, 1998).

#### Rationale for Citizenship Education

*Education for Citizenship: Ideas and Innovations in Political Learning*, edited by Grant Reeher and Joseph Cammarano, provides a unique variation to the traditional rationale for citizenship education. In the foreword, Benjamin Barber provides thoughtful insight on how to develop citizenship-education programs to support and maintain a democratic governance. The argument that social-studies teachers and scholars commonly use to support citizenship-education programs is that the lack of such programs negatively impacts the *individual*. In contrast, Barber's argument focuses on the significant detriment to *an entire nation* if citizens are not taught civic responsibility. Barber argues the consequences of not providing citizenship education are that citizens will develop a lack of interest in current events, have low voter-

turnout, distrust the government, and have the idea that the government is wasteful and inefficient (1997). Barber argues that if too many citizens are not civically engaged, a democracy can fail.

Barber (1997) cites the failure in recent attempts to establish democracies in other parts of the world was due to the lack of citizenship preparation. These young democracies had failed because the citizens of the nation were not properly prepared for such work and responsibility (Barber, 1997). Barber states that the demise of these governments was ultimately due to the lack of a civic foundation that crippled the liberties necessary to promote a democratic society (1997). Even though military force can remove a dictator from power, individual citizens and their involvement in civic and political life must support and promote democracy (Barber, 1997). Students must learn that a democratic form of government needs citizenship participation, and they must gain skills to participate in that democracy.

Students must be taught that the opinions of the citizens, and more importantly how citizens voice these opinions, impact the governance of the nation (Barber, 1997). Students must be shown how to find solutions to problems in, and therefore improve, society (Barber, 1997). Students should participate in critical debate regarding their democracy and learn about government procedures, politicians, and laws. Through this discourse, educators model and equip students with the ability to make real changes for their community and nation (Barber, 1997). Barber is clear in stating that community engagement is an important aspect of civic engagement.

A second point Barber makes is the trend in university mission statements and their initiatives that focus on workforce development. What seems to have become a universal focus of higher education, to produce skilled workers to promote local and regional economies, has resulted in shifting the focus away from education for citizenship (Barber, 1997). If an institution is charged with producing a workforce instead of a citizen, a trend toward economic gains at the cost of democracy will continue (Barber, 1997). Barber believes that the individual pursuit of wealth, the motivation of success, and the disregard for citizenship in the educational system are causes for concern.

One last argument Barber makes is the need to keep students in the public school system rather than drive them toward the private-education sector. Barber states the voucher that gives parents funds to move their students from a failing school to a private school does not address the problems present in the public school system. Instead, this movement is abandoning the vision of the founding fathers (specifically Thomas Jefferson) that a public system should educate young United States citizens. Barber warns about the potential problems of placing the responsibility of civic education in the hands of capitalist-minded institutions, where pursuit of wealth and motivation for success take precedence over civic engagement.

#### History of Civic Education in the United States

During the past 130 years, civic education has been well established as an outcome for the social-studies curriculum. The original focus of the civics classroom was on history and the studies associated with learning about past civilizations. Since its conception, the curriculum has evolved from one focused on history and social efficiency to a curriculum focused on preparing

students for society. While teaching basic content knowledge will remain part of the social-studies curriculum to provide students with the necessary information to understand the dynamic concepts and historical significance of events, the social-studies curriculum has evolved to focus on democratic education that includes activities to teach students to become social agents, engaged in their communities.

Since the 1880s, the social-studies classroom has served as the formal social institution that teaches students the skills necessary for civic participation and prepares them for what Thomas Jefferson once described as the “office of citizen” (Evans, 2004). During the time of the United States’ Industrial Revolution, schools embarked on a process of reshaping and redefining their identity as the social institutions they are today (Evans, 2004). The social-studies classroom transformed into a venue to teach and develop active citizens (Burroughs, Hopper, Brocatum, & Sanders, 2008). Many of the common themes from the traditional history curriculum became staples of the social-studies curriculum and have remained popular today, as social-studies educators focused on teaching the common good and civic responsibility (Evans, 2004). Documented in the history of the social-studies field are attempts by scholars to teach history to promote other virtues that will safeguard a democratic republic. These virtues include character education, social responsibility, and community engagement (Evans, 2004).

In the United States, until the 1880s, history curriculum focused on rudimentary facts and dates covering ancient Greece and Rome, basic United States’ history, and the American Revolution (Evans, 2004). Facts and dates played a primary role in the curriculum. Compared to more contemporary approaches to the social studies, little attention was paid to the other

social-study areas, such as citizenship. In other words, history dominated the field. In 1884 the American Historical Association (AHA) emerged as the first professional organization in the social-studies field. While it primarily focused on history education, the AHA would later be credited with providing justification and a foundation for a national social-studies curriculum that included other areas of social studies that focus on civic education. Today, over 100 years later, the AHA is dedicated to promoting historical studies, preserving historical documents, and teaching historical research methods (AHA, 2004).

Beginning in the 1890s and lasting for more than two decades, standardization of the social-studies curriculum was largely debated by historians and educators (Evans, 2004). The debate started as a review of college admission criteria, which uncovered the “chaotic” and inconsistent approach to the social-studies curriculum in the United States (Evans, 2004). The discussions focused on skills that should have been taught in high schools to prepare students for college or life after graduation. During the twenty years of debate, several appointed committees and conventions dominated by historians discussed the national social-studies curriculum. They were committed to reconciling the differences among social-studies scholars and attempting to provide a consistent curriculum (Evans, 2004).

By the end of the 1880s, the National Education Association called for a national commission to develop a high-school curriculum that prepared students for advanced coursework in college (Evans, 2004). The committee recommended an eight-year sequence, starting in fifth grade and concluding in twelfth grade (Evans, 2004). During this eight-year period, students would learn mythology, biography, United States’ history, and civil government, as well as

Greek, Roman, French, and English History (Evans, 2004). The committee believed all students, whether college-bound or not, should have the same curriculum (Evans, 2004).

The 1916 Report of the Social Studies Commission is credited by many to have established the national curriculum for social studies. The 1916 report states, “Social studies of the American high school should have for their conscious and constant purpose the cultivation of good citizenship” (Evan, 2004). Scholars later proclaimed the 1916 Report of the Social Studies provided a purpose for social-studies education (Bair, 2006). The spirit of the 1916 report is well preserved in current curriculum standards and promotes the idea of a social-studies curriculum that develops students for civic participation.

John Dewey, while not directly involved in the debate, was credited with having the greatest influence on the 1916 report (Evans, 2004). His work encouraged a progressive approach to the social-studies curriculum that considered the students’ developmental needs instead of a history-focused curriculum (Evans, 2004). Dewey encouraged the use of student reflection while students learned social studies. Today, Dewey remains influential in the social-studies curriculum and citizenship education.

John Dewey is frequently cited in the literature for his work and theory of civic education. Dewey, in his classic work *Democracy and Education*, establishes the role of the United States’ educational system as the primary social institution responsible for the moral development of students in preparation for life in a democratic society (Dewey, 1916). Dewey pays special attention to how the curriculum and school environment provide an experience for students to develop moral character and the skills necessary to be efficient citizens. Affirming



that "...schools remain, of course, the typical instance of environments framed with express reference to influencing the mental and moral disposition of their members...", Dewey pays special attention to the environment of the society as influencing the development of "...immature..." citizens. Dewey argues that moral development should be taught through both formal and informal methods, through life experiences, and through the school curriculum, as well as through relationships with adults in society (Dewey, 1916).

Through Dewey's writing, several themes emerge that deserve greater understanding when one discusses civic education. Schools ensure the transformation and renewal of a democracy. Dewey's famous statement "...democracy has to be born anew every generation and education is its midwife..." demonstrates the role schools play in the rebirth of democracy with each generation (Dewey, 1933). The values of a democratic nation evolve with the needs and desires of the people. A school's curriculum and its teachers ensure this renewal is possible. Dewey argues that teachers provide students with the skills and ability to re-examine the values of the society.

Formal education is a social institution that provides the youth of a nation or state with the opportunity to learn citizenship skills, develop moral character, and become socially efficient. While evidence of citizenship education exists prior to the birth of organizations such as AHA and NCSS, the creation of these organizations helped the social-studies curriculum to focus consistently on such outcomes. These organizations have dedicated their work to developing civic education programs and provide teachers and administrators with resources and tools to support civic education. Countless other organizations, as well as college universities

supported think-tanks, have established initiatives and programs aimed at developing civic education in hopes to serve the democracy.

Since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the intended outcome of a citizenship-education curriculum has been to prepare students to successfully participate in society. Such a curriculum provides students with skills to understand society in relation to the shared human experience. Citizenship education teaches students the importance, functions, and processes of social institutions. Equipped with a better understanding, students are more likely to participate and be more effective in social interactions. In the process, students will become indoctrinated into society and better understand social norms and customs. At the very least, citizenship education will provide basic knowledge of government processes, laws, and the nation. In an ideal situation, citizenship education will help students develop ethical standards, enhance their moral character, and encourage pride in the nation.

One theme of the curriculum remains important today: citizenship education is defined as teaching skills, knowledge, and civic responsibility to help students develop characteristics important to the common good of society. In more progressive definitions, citizenship education teaches students analytical and critical thinking skills to become more socially efficient. In 1995, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) stated the purpose of the social-studies curriculum is to develop “... citizens for the common good ...” (Bair, 2006). Twenty-five years later, this theme remains the focus for social-studies educators.

## Character Education

Seldom is civic education discussed without attention to character education.

Together, character education and civic education cultivate students in becoming responsible and engaged citizens who are prepared for life in a democratic society. The National Council for the Social Studies cites Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as stating “intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education” (NCSS, 2011a). The idea of character education is as much a part of the social-studies curriculum and a part of the history of the social-studies field as civic education. To discuss civic education without addressing character education would provide an incomplete understanding of these two related and intertwined concepts.

Frequently, character education and civic education are cited in tandem as the foundation for the social-studies classroom curriculum. To add complexity to the literature, the terms are used interchangeably and at times used synonymously with moral and values education (Russell & Waters, 2010). In addition to the researcher’s discussing the relationship and connection of the two concepts, a distinction between the two should be made for the purposes of this study. Both character and civic education aim at preparing students for future citizenship that includes social responsibility and the ideal that students learn to make decisions for the common good of society, but the distinction between character education and civic education must be discussed. Character education is focused on the civic virtues of the individual (CEP, 2010). The Character Education Partnership (CEP), a character-education organization, is focused on “...building a nation of ethical citizens...” and believes that students should learn “...honesty, respect, responsibility and diligence...” (CEP, 2010). In comparison, civic education is focused on teaching students to become engaged in their obligation as citizens. Together, civic and

character education provides ideal virtues for how students are engaged in civic life (i.e., voting, volunteering, governing, working within the community, and networking within society).

### World Views on Citizenship Education

For a state-funded education system to establish and support a curriculum that promotes a national identity and, in some cases, indoctrinates its young citizens to a political system or party seems natural. In order to preserve the political party's control or authority, the government has an incentive to teach students to support its functions. The challenge is determining how involved a government should be in how and what students learn. While the need to teach students democratic values is important to sustain a democracy, at what point are students no longer taught and instead are indoctrinated to follow a political system of the state? In some cases, indoctrination of young citizens to ensure a future for a particular form of government is the intended outcome of the curriculum. Examples of teaching civics for indoctrination can be found overseas.

The phenomenon of civic education is not exclusive to the United States' school system; many industrialized nations have passed legislation that calls on schools to provide civic education to students. For example, research cites several countries including Australia, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Netherlands that promote citizenship education. As of 2006, public schools in the Netherlands are "...formally obligated..." to provide citizenship education to students (Veugelers, 2007). Australia, Hungary, and the countries of the United Kingdom have developed a similar approach as the United States' by using their schools as the primary, formal institutions to prepare students for civil society and

civic participation. The similarities among these nations are obvious in some cases (i.e., Australia, the countries of United Kingdom, and the United States) because these countries share an intertwined common history and remain dependent on citizenship participation to ensure their governance and a healthy democracy. In addition, Hungary shares a common concern that their youth are becoming increasingly disengaged from civic life and struggles to ensure future civic participation by their young citizens (Pepper, Burroughs, & Groce, 2003). This has resulted in comparison studies between the United States' approach to democratic education and other nations.

In contrast, other nations, such as the Czech Republic which does not have a long history of democratic traditions, have used the civics classroom to teach indoctrination of the current government. The Czech Republic, a former Communist nation, has redesigned its civics curriculum at the national level to address the need to develop democratically-minded citizens. As a result of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Czech Republic, formerly known as Czechoslovakia, has dismantled its former approach to civic education. The approach to civics prior to the revolution resulted in a boring subject; students claimed that their civics class was their least favorite subject primarily because the curriculum focused on indoctrinating students to ensure support of the communist party (Mauch, 1995). In Czechoslovakia, the civics curriculum provided a method, through its schools' curriculum, to develop patriotism for the nation, to instill appreciation for communist values, and to indoctrinate young citizens to secure a level of "political control" over its citizens (Mauch, 1995).

Through new democratic education programs in the Czech Republic, teachers are now using the civics classroom to teach students to become responsible democratic citizens (Mauch, 1995). The overhauling of the Czech Republic's civics curriculum at the national level represents a systematic approach to redesigning civic education. Through this process, the Czech Republic experienced commonalities in the challenges that have plagued historically democratic nations (Mauch, 1995). Specifically, the Czech Republic has faced challenges in preparing teachers to effectively teach civic education, moving from a passive student experience (the focus of transferring content from the teacher to the student) to a more active learning approach where students learn how to develop their civic skills through engaging lessons (Hamot, 1997). The commonalities between the Czech Republic and historically democratic nations include determining the relevant content knowledge necessary for young citizens, promoting best practices in teaching critical thinking skills, supporting the development of personal political ideology, encouraging community engagement, and ensuring healthy civic discourse (Hamot, 1997). To achieve this, the Institute for Educational Development (IED) and its faculty at Charles University in Prague and the University of Iowa College of Education have partnered to develop resources to support teachers in the Czech Republic to create a democratic education program (Hamot, 1997).

Global partnerships in creating civic-education curriculum not only benefit new democracies, but evidence also shows this type of partnership benefits established democracies (Burroughs, Hopper, Brocatim, & Sanders, 2007). Based on a 2007 study on the perspective of citizenship education from a global context from teachers in the United States, Europe, and Latin

America, Burroughs et al. (2007) argue that democratic education programs benefit from considering a more global view. The authors affirm, “as the world becomes smaller, education for democracy at home and abroad must incorporate global views of teaching for and about citizenship” (Burroughs et al., 2007). From this global perspective, students will benefit from curriculum that provides a culturally-rich learning opportunity and will train and equip them to become better prepared for a globalized marketplace.

In *The World is Flat* (2005), Thomas Friedman argues that a nation’s ability to understand foreign cultures, learn how to work collaboratively with other nations, and, most importantly, learn how to adopt good ideas and best practices from other cultures will ensure their survival and success in the global marketplace. Friedman outlines evidence that the world is “flattening” as communication and the marketplace becomes increasingly available to nations (2005). Friedman uses the term “glocalizing” to describe a nation’s ability to adopt good ideas from other nations for use in its own country to benefit the workforce, which, in return, provides economic gain (2005). This argument supports the claim that classroom teachers should focus more attention on other cultures; curriculum should allow students multiple opportunities to gain the skills necessary to compete in a global market; and students should be given the skills needed to understand how to glocalize ideas. The acquisition of such skills allows students to understand how a nation’s history impacts its industry, culture, politics, and social norms, all of which is knowledge that will benefit students as they participate in democracy and enter the workforce. As economic globalization continues, classroom instruction must include an internationally and culturally diverse perspective on the concept of civics and citizenship

education if United States citizens hope to remain competitive as a nation (Burroughs, Hopper, Brocatim, & Sanders, 2007).

According to Pike (2007), despite recent legislation to promote active citizenship in countries in the United Kingdom, educators will need more than a new curriculum to produce the desired results. Pike argues a cross-curricular approach is necessary to encourage citizenship activism in students. In order for students to see beyond the discipline, students must be challenged to learn beyond their personal experiences and consider the experiences of other people and disciplines (2007). A concrete example and rationale Pike provides is to teach students the proper use of science methodologies to ensure students have a well-rounded understanding of complex issues. Understanding science helps students make sense of complex issues while they are formulating an opinion. If students learn critical thinking skills and use of rational and logical thought, they will be more capable of making informed decisions. If students better understand an issue debated at the national level, they will be more likely to adopt an opinion and become better participants as a result (Pike, 2007).

Now more than ever, citizenship education remains an important outcome for the social-studies curriculum in both the United States and abroad. With voter-turnout at an all-time low and general citizen distrust of government officials and politicians at an all-time high, the United States and other nations of the world are faced with an uphill battle to encourage citizen participation in students (Print, 2007). Today, social-studies educators are faced with great challenges to develop socially-efficient students with skills necessary to compete in a complex world and globalized economy.



Annette (2005) of Birkbeck College provided an interesting variation to the traditional rationale for citizenship education in “Character, Civic Renewal and Service Learning for Democratic Citizenship in Higher Education.” Annette examines the opportunity to promote civic participation through service learning-projects within the college and university curriculum (2005). Promoting citizenship education through service learning presents an interesting opportunity for community colleges and universities that are growing such programs. Service learning promises a unique opportunity for students to obtain real-life experience by working in a social institution. As a result, students gain practical skills through a popular co-curricular course while they earn college credit.

#### Democratic Education in the Curriculum

In *Education for Democratic Citizenship: Decision Making in the Social Studies* (1988), Shirley H. Engle and Anna S. Ochoa argue for a problem-solving approach to teaching citizenship education. (Engle and Ochoa are careful to frame their discussion within the context of the United States’ democracy system, not the democracy of other nations.) Engle and Ochoa argue that educators must teach students a foundation for a citizenship-education program, one which includes basic knowledge of government, teaching students to foster democracy, “intellectual skills,” and political skills (1988). These four areas serve as the foundation for citizenship education.

Engle and Ochoa (1988) discuss a model for encouraging students to use reflective thought in political decision-making. The model outlined in the book is similar to other models, such as the Center for Civic Education’s curriculum series Project Citizen. In summary, these

models focus on students identifying public issues of concern to them, conducting research to better understand the problem, and determining possible solutions for the problem (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). For students to complete these tasks and ensure their ability to function in a democratic society, students must have analytical thinking skills (Burroughs, Hopper, Brocatim, & Sanders, 2007). During the inquiry-based research process, students learn how to be active and engaged citizens as they develop an understanding of the issue and work toward identifying a plausible solution. Students are encouraged to use the research methods to collect information while formulating their opinion on the issues (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). The authors argue that students should be reflective as they gather information and make judgments on the topic. In the end, students will be able to establish their opinion on the issue with better confidence.

Engle and Ochoa suggest a problem-based approach as it models real-life scenarios educators hope to prepare students to address (1988). This approach requires students, with the help of parents, peers, and community partners, to identify an issue in society that needs to be addressed. Much like The Center for Civic Education's curriculum titled Project Citizen, students follow a progressive series of steps to select and define a topic, research the problem, and make recommendations on how to address the problem. While controlling all variables and simulating the real world are difficult challenges, a problems-based approach comes close to providing students with a real-life laboratory in which to experiment and learn (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). The survival of democratic systems depends on the success of civic educators in achieving this level of participation in the classroom (Burroughs, Hopper, Brocatim, & Sanders, 2007).

In *Education for Citizenship: Ideas and Innovations in Political Learning*, Benjamin Barber (1997) argues that history lessons should no longer be focused on predominantly white men and instead should focus on the how all citizens, including minorities, contribute to the governance of the nation. Educators should end the dry, boring storytelling and instead equip students to become citizens by modeling the traits that are important for the nation's democracy. The focus of civic-education courses should be the critical discourse of current events and public policy issues and how government should protect individual rights and liberties (Barber, 1997). Students must learn that not all of their ideas will be accepted. Students should understand that diversity among individuals will create different opinions and that not all ideas can be adopted (Barber, 1997). Individuals must learn that compromise is necessary when a consensus is difficult to obtain. Effectively debating points and communicating opinions are important skills for citizens in the democratic process. Students must learn to be open-minded to other students' opinions, suspend immediate judgment, and accept that, while they may win some debates, they will also lose others. In the end, the democratic process, if it is fair and truly represents the will of the people, will work for its citizens. In order for students to participate, students must learn to appreciate this process (Barber, 1997).

Civic education must be learned by "active participation and not passive observations" (Levinson, 2009, p.33). Levinson provided the following examples of potential classroom activities that encourage student participation: work with classmates to discuss and implement strategies to improve school, debate current events, write letters to elected officials that express a student's opinion of a topic, or conduct a voter-registration campaign (2009). Education and the

influence of adults in the classroom can provide a unique opportunity and instrumental role in modeling and teaching citizenship engagement. Furthermore, Juan Carlos Huerta and Joseph Jozwiak (2008) argue an active learning approach will improve civic education.

### Civic Education in the Community College

Commonly found in the literature are rationales for citizenship education in the K-12 system as well as in universities and colleges. While some community colleges address citizenship in their mission statements, little research has been focused on community-college citizenship-education. Despite a lack of research in community-college citizenship, research conducted in university and college settings can help one to make broad conclusions for improving citizenship programs in the community college. Further research into methods for teaching citizenship at the community-college level will add to knowledge on citizenship education in higher education in general. Also frequently found in the literature, as well as in the mission and value statements of colleges and universities, is the focus paid to civic leadership in post-secondary education. The same level of attention is paid to K-12 classes with a particular focus on citizenship education.

### How College Affects Students

Alexander Astin, known for extensive research in the area of student involvement and its affective impact on students and learning, argues that a student's involvement in college life is the single most significant factor in making a lasting and meaningful difference in learning (Astin, 1993). Astin provides significant quantitative evidence to support the theory that student involvement in campus activities and engagement in the learning process leads to better retention

of students, ensures a higher degree of student satisfaction in the institution's programs (curricular and extracurricular), and makes a meaningful longer-term impression on the individual (1993). In *What Matters in College*, Astin provides data that students who are involved in volunteer activities (such as tutoring peers) and other civic activities (such as participating in campus demonstrations) make significant gains in personality measurements on leadership skills and social activism (1993). Astin argues a positive correlation exists between students who are involved in volunteer work on campus and the likelihood that they develop a "meaningful philosophy of life," develop racial understanding, and participate in activities focused on the betterment of society and the surrounding community (1993). Additionally, students who volunteer report that they do not believe a college education will definitely provide them with the ability to make more money, but they do believe that their actions can make a difference in society. (Astin, 1993).

Astin points out the recent attention that higher education has paid to students who volunteer while enrolled in college. Astin claims that volunteering has a positive impact on student development. Specifically, students who volunteer develop positive character qualities such as leadership skills and develop an interest in pursuing the common good of society. Additionally, students who volunteer tend to lack the expectation that a college degree will mean greater financial gains and instead are interested in how college will help them to be better citizens. Astin argues if students are involved in meaningful volunteer activities associated with their college experience, they will develop important leadership skills and character qualities which support the common good of society, a goal shared with civic educators (1993).

To summarize Astin's theory: Students who are actively involved in campus civic-based programs will make a lasting impact on citizenship engagement. Astin's involvement theory, if used to engage student in civics and implemented along with the strategies recommended by NCSS and CIRCLE, would yield significant gains in citizenship engagement. Post-secondary institutions, specifically community colleges, have the potential to influence civic engagement if the institution makes this engagement an institutional priority.

#### A Generational Shift in Civic and Political Engagement

A theme has emerged from contemporary literature on civic engagement. While traditional indicators of political engagement are lower among the generation of citizens born between 1976 and 1989, commonly named Millennials, or Generation Y, or (as referred to by Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli-Carpini, 2006) DotNets, non-traditional indicators, such as volunteering, have become a more frequently observed form of engagement. In *A New Engagement?* (2006), Zukin et al. outline a comprehensive research project, which sheds light on a new form of civic and political engagement. While the traditional indicators of civic engagement are included in this study, the particular team of researchers hoped to uncover how the youngest generation of adults is becoming politically active in the world around them.

Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli-Carpini (2006) suggest and support the claim with their research that the youngest generation has demonstrated great potential and promises to surpass other generations in civic engagement, based on evidence shown in their current trends in civic engagement (i.e., volunteering and participating in the community). These claims contradict literature that cites lower voter-turnout and voter-registration statistics for DotNets as

compared to other generations. The authors of *A New Engagement?* did not base the research on traditional definitions and qualifiers of civic and political engagement. Instead, the authors conducted extensive focus-group conversations across generations and developed operational definitions of the terms used in their study to better understand the complex and dynamic nature of the idea of civic engagement. As a result of their research, they developed a clear distinction between civic and political engagement. This distinction was necessary for the establishment of their assertions that while the youngest generation of adults, the DotNet generation, are a bit less politically engaged, in comparison to other generations, they are more non-politically engaged (Zukin et al., 2006). Zukin et al. argue that the DotNet generation is much more likely than other generations to be civically engaged by way of volunteering, boycotting products, and using consumerism as an approach to making a statement about their political preferences. The authors, by clearly defining the difference in civic and political engagement, along with presenting their research findings, demonstrate that the DotNet generation is already engaged, on its own terms, at a much higher rate than other generations (Zukin et al., 2006). Furthermore, if history is any indication, this level of engagement will only grow as this generation better defines its ideology and refines its ability to organize (Zukin et al., 2006).

The foundation of the study is based on focus-group conversations with DotNets regarding citizenship. When asked whether "...citizenship carried any responsibilities..." the participants frequently stated that "...good conduct, looking after at one's family, and occasionally being a good neighbor ... was the basis for good citizenship" (Zukin et al., 2006). More importantly, few mentioned "voting, staying informed, or participating" in politics as

necessary components to being good citizens (Zukin et al., 2006). Within the Generation X and DotNet groups, this shift in attitude and understanding of civic engagement, as well as the higher rates of volunteering, demonstrates that the younger generations do not lack civic engagement; instead, they understand civic engagement to be different than the traditional notion of past generations (Zukin et al., 2006).

Research from *A New Engagement?* supports the assertions made by Colby and the Carnegie Foundation: students graduating from high school and entering colleges and universities are provided opportunities, incentives, support, and encouragement to volunteer, resulting in a much higher rate of young people volunteerism. Zukin et al. describe this phenomenon as the “carrots and sticks” impact on civic engagement (2006). Because of these incentives, young United States citizens in high schools and those enrolled in post-secondary institutions are volunteering at much higher rates than students did in the past (Zukin et al., 2006). In some cases colleges, universities and high schools have mandated volunteering as a graduation requirement or integrated volunteering in their curriculum, which appears to be making an impact on civic engagement. Zukin et al. provide evidence from the National Youth Survey that supports these claims: 59 percent of students who were required by their high school as a part of a course to volunteer had done so in the past year, as compared to 37 percent who volunteered but were not required (2006).

Besides volunteering, DotNet generation citizens in the United States have taken a different approach to making society a better place. Instead of working within the political arena to influence change in society, young U.S. citizens have taken a more corporate approach to



influence change in society (Zukin et al., 2006). DotNet citizens believe that corporate and private United States' businesses have a greater impact on their life, more than public and government institutions, which has changed their approach from political engagement to civic engagement (Zukin et al., 2006). Because of this belief that corporations have a greater influence than politicians and government, DotNet citizens work within these systems to make change in society. Behaviors such as boycotting products, purchasing items from green companies, and sharing their opinions electronically (on blogs, on social-networking sites, and in emails) have changed the way young people are engaged (Zukin et al., 2006).

The findings presented from *A New Engagement?* have made a significant impact on this current study. This study includes an exploration of both traditional political engagement (voting and voting-registration rates) as well as a more contemporary view of civic engagement, shared with the younger generation, which includes volunteering and being involved in society in a way that improves the surrounding community and its people. Because the average age of Wilson Community College students is 23.6 years (placing them in the middle of the DotNet generation), the instrument for measuring engagement must include items to measure engagement in both civic and political terms. Because of this shift in engagement, an open-ended, qualitative, phenomenological research design will be used to address the gap in academic research of community college student civic-engagement. With a better understanding of how community college students define civic engagement, scholars, post-secondary educators, and policy-makers can make better sense of the potential of the community college in developing young citizens.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### Research Questions

1. How do Wilson Community College students define civic engagement?
2. How are Wilson Community College students civically engaged on campus and in the community?
3. How has the Wilson Community College coursework (curriculum) affected students' attitudes and perceptions about civic engagement during a student's two-year program?
4. How does the Wilson Community College curriculum affect the students' level of civic engagement?

### Research Design

A grounded-theory approach qualitative-research design was employed to answer the research questions outlined above. Glaser defines Grounded Theory as a qualitative methodology connected to data collected which employs a systematic approach aimed at establishing an “inductive theory about a substantive area” (Glaser, 1992). This approach results in a conceptual hypotheses for the subject studied (Glaser). The grounded-theory approach provided the researcher a systematic approach to developing a working theory to better understand student civic-engagement at the community college. If the researcher is inclined, further studies can test the hypotheses developed from a ground theory approach. The point of grounded theory is to establish a hypothesis. This research study provided insight to how Wilson Community College students define civic engagement and perceive their level of civic

engagement on campus and in the community, how their attitudes and perceptions are shaped by their program, and how the curriculum has impacted their understanding of civic engagement. The data collected, using Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory approach to qualitative research, provided an understanding of civic engagement within the community-college environment. This study provided greater insight to how Wilson Community College's curriculum impacts the student belief-system pertaining to civic engagement. This insight provides community-college educators with data to better understand how curriculum can influence students' understanding and perceptions on civic engagement. Additionally, this study presents data on how community college students define civic engagement and how this definition fits within the college curriculum. The data collected from this research will support efforts to better understand the role the college environment has on civic education.

#### Locating a Sample Population

The researcher worked with faculty at Wilson Community College to identify students to participate in the research study. Data were collected from three sources: qualitative open-response civic-engagement questionnaires, focus groups, and a drawing activity about civic engagement. The data collected during the research study were coded and analyzed using Grounded Theory to establish a working theory to better understand how the Wilson Community College coursework affects student involvement in civics education. The researcher identified a professor at Wilson Community College who had agreed to provide instructional class time to facilitate this research study. For the purposes of this study the pseudonym Professor Hooks is used to protect the identity of the Wilson Community College professor.

Professor Sula Hooks is a full-time professor at Wilson Community College. With seven years of teaching experience, Professor Hooks primarily teaches English composition courses (ENC 1101 and ENC 1102). While Professor Hooks is credentialed to teach developmental English courses, creative writing courses, and literature courses, her primary course offerings are composition courses that are required for all degree-seeking students who are enrolled at Wilson Community College. Composition courses are offered through the Communications Department, which also offers Speech (Public Speaking), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Film, Literature, and Developmental Reading and English courses.

Other departments and courses have concentrations of students who are focused in a particular discipline. Because English composition is a required class for all students who are degree-seeking, this course provided a group of students who better reflect the demographics of the larger population. At Wilson Community College, only two other courses are required for all students who are degree seeking, U.S. Government (POS 2041) and Speech (SPC 1608). POS 2041 was not used for this study to avoid collecting data from a population of students who are actively engaged in learning about government and civics. While SPC 1608 could have provided a viable group of students to participate in this study, Professor Hooks was interested in supporting this research study and was selected out of convenience. The sample for this study is defined as a convenience sample.

Identifying students from a composition course for this study ensures a representative population from the college community. During the sampling process students, participating in the study, were asked general demographic information (age, ethnicity, and gender) to ensure the

sample was representative of the larger college population. Even though grounded-theory studies do not attempt to make generalizations to the larger population, for the study, the researcher intended to find a sample that is reflective of the general student population. The sample population involved in this study represents the larger college population of Wilson College in all demographic areas including age, ethnic background and gender. The only ethnic group underrepresented in this study was Asian American students. Of the 98 students who completed the demographic information form none indicated they were Asian American in comparison to 5% of the college population (Wilson College Fact Book, 2010).

#### Population

The population for this study includes all students enrolled at Wilson Community College during the Fall 2011 term. The sample population included students who were enrolled in Professor Hooks' English courses and had completed the civic-engagement questionnaire and/or volunteered to complete a focus group and the drawing activity. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. The sample for this study is considered to be a convenience sample. A convenience sample was necessary due to logistical limitations and the financial feasibility of the study. Students who completed the focus-group session and submitted a completed drawing activity were given a \$10.00 Target gift card. Detailed explanations had been given to the students regarding the time commitment for the study, and students were advised of the gift card during the first visit to the class when students had learned of the research study.

Following Glaser and Strauss's grounded-theory sampling procedures, the sampling process was completed in a two-step process, initial and theoretical sampling. During the initial

sampling process, a group of participants had been selected to be a part of this study. This initial group of participants were defined as all students enrolled in Professor Hooks' ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 courses (six total sections) which met on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8:00am, 10:00am, 11:00am, and 2:00pm, and Tuesday and Thursday 10:00am and 11:30am, respectively. Initially, students in all six classes were asked to complete the questionnaires and the supplemental information form that collected demographic information of the sample population. The supplemental information was used to help ensure the sample is reflective of the larger Wilson Community College population

During the second phase of the research study, the same groups of students, students enrolled in Professor Hooks' classes, were asked to volunteer for a focus-group session. Students who participated were asked questions based on responses from the questionnaire pertaining to civic engagement. Using grounded-theory sampling techniques, the principal researcher collected initial data from the questionnaire and follow-up information with focus-group sessions and collected data from the drawing activity that was used to establish a working theory on civic engagement. The second phase of data collection followed Glaser and Strauss's theoretical sampling procedures.

#### Wilson Community College Students

The setting of this research project was Wilson Community College located in the southeastern region of the United States. The college is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Based on the 2010 U.S. Census data, the college service district, which includes two counties, has an estimated combined population of 1.4 million residents. Founded

in 1967, Wilson Community College has grown from a single site to five campuses that serve more than 63,000 credit- and non-credit-earning students. Wilson Community College employs approximately 433 full-time faculty. Approximately 63 percent of Wilson Community College's faculty has earned a Master's Degree, and 15.5 percent have earned a doctoral degree.

Approximately 56.7 percent of the student population is female, and 42.7 percent is male. The average age of students enrolled at Wilson Community College is 23.6 years old. The online Wilson Community College Fact Book states the average class size at Wilson Community College is 23.7 students. (Wilson Community College Fact Book, 2010)

Wilson Community College is nationally recognized for its graduation rates among two-year institutions and for closing the gap between rates of minority student and Caucasian students. Wilson Community College's four-year graduation rate for college-ready students is 42.8%, and the gap between Hispanic and Caucasian students has been eliminated as Hispanic students are graduating at a higher rate than their Caucasian counterparts. Wilson Community College is ranked first in the nation among two-year institutions for the total number (1200) of two-year degrees awarded annually. (Wilson Community College Future Student, 2011)

During the fall of 2010, total enrollment for Wilson Community College was 55,302 students, which included three categories of students: Credit-Seeking Students, Post-Secondary Adult Vocational, and Continuing Education (Wilson Community College Fact Book, 2011). The Post-Secondary Adult Vocational and Continuing Education programs were included in this study, resulting in a total study population of approximately 38,780. Only credit-seeking

students, those who are A.A. Degree, A.S. Degree, or non-degree seeking (for credit) were included in this study.

Including all students' classifications, Credit-Seeking Students, Post-Secondary Adult Vocational, and Continuing Education, more than half the students, 56.5% or 31,245 students, are female, 43.1% or 23,844 students are male, and the gender of 213 or 0.4% is unknown (Wilson Fact Book, 2010).

#### Breakdown of Male and Female Students

With a total of 31,245 female and 23,844 male students, female students outnumber male students at Wilson Community College (Wilson Fact Book, 2010).

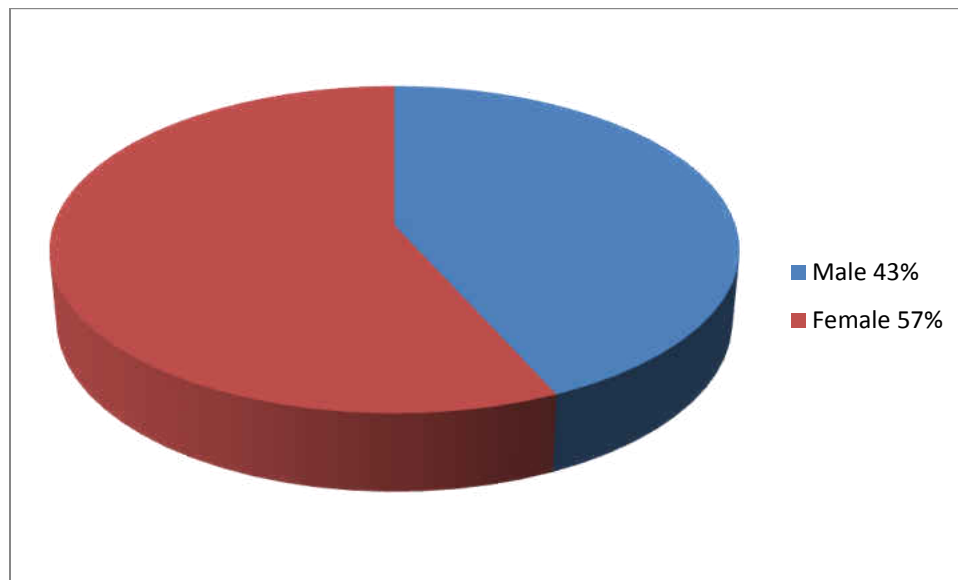


Figure 1 Gender Distribution of Wilson Community College Students



Table 1. Gender Percentages and Totals of Wilson Community College Students

Gender	Percentage	Totals
Male	43.1%	23,844
Female	56.5%	31,245
Unknown	0.4%	213
		55,302

Age Distribution and Average Age of Wilson Community College Students

The average age for Wilson Community College student is 23.6 years with 21.4% who are under 18 years old and ineligible to vote, and 30,494 over the age of 18 (legal voting-age) in the following age categories: 19-20 age group, 27.8 percent; 21-24 age group, 23.1 percent; 25-34 age group, 18.0 percent, 35-44 age group, 6.2 percent; and 45 and over age group, 3.6 percent (Wilson Fact Book, 2010).

Table 2. Age Distribution of Wilson Community College Students

Age (years)	Percentage	Totals
18 and under	21.4%	8,280
19-20	27.8%	10,774
21-24	23.1%	8,957
25-34	18.0%	6,973
35-44	6.2%	2,398
45 and over	3.6%	1,392
	Mean 23.6 years	Total 38,774

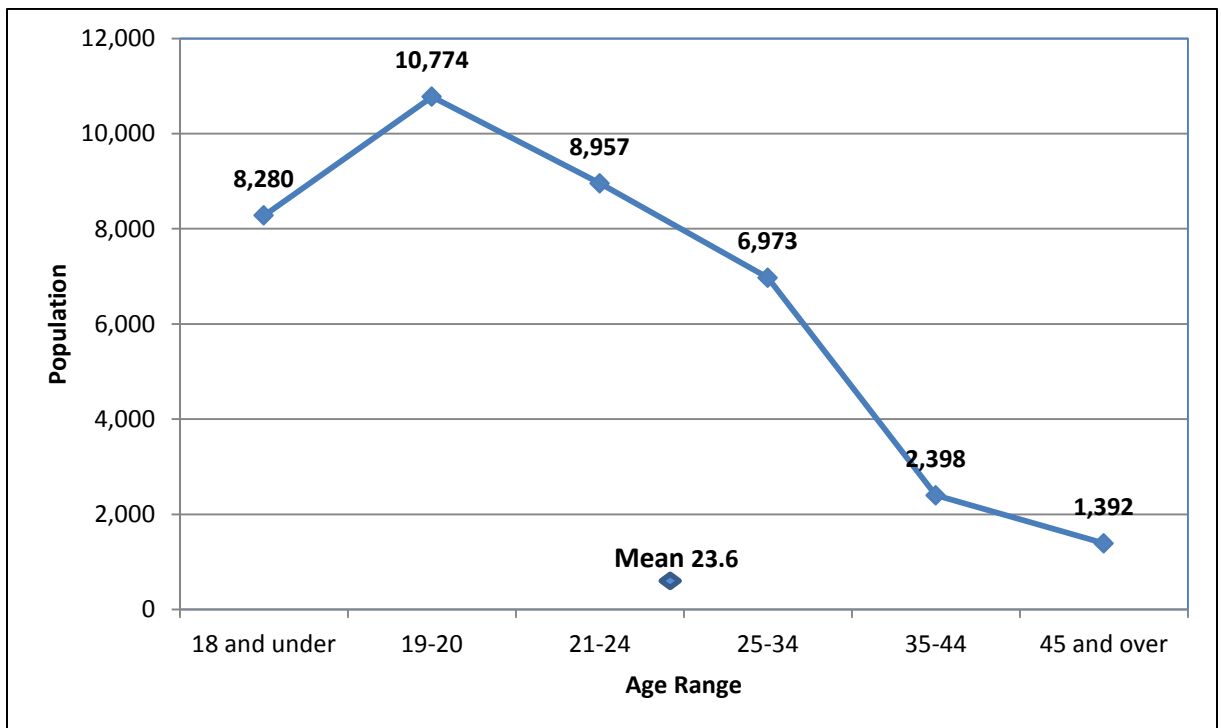


Figure 2 Age Distribution

### Breakdown of Ethnic Students

The college has earned the distinction of being a Hispanic-Serving Institution as a result of its diverse student population. Wilson Community College's student population is 39.2% Caucasian, 27.5% Hispanic, 16.6% African America, 11.6% Other, and 5.0% Asian/Pacific Islander (Wilson Community College Future Student, 2011).

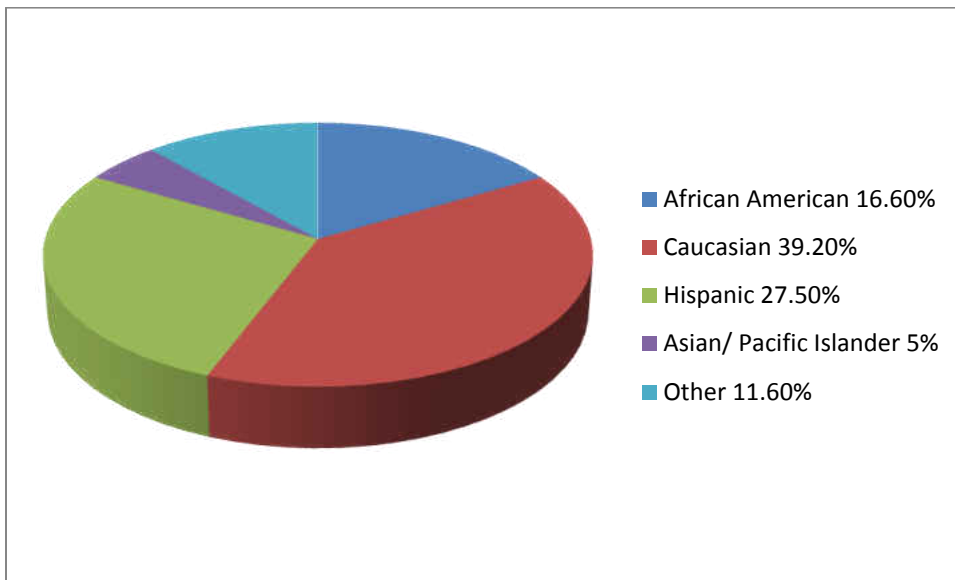


Figure 3. Ethnic Distribution of Wilson Community College Students

Table 3. Ethnic Percentages and Totals of Wilson Community College Students

Ethnicity	Percentage	Totals
African American	16.6%	9,190
Caucasian	39.2%	21,684
Hispanic	27.5%	15,200
Asian/Pacific Islander	5%	2,786
Other	11.6%	6,441
	Total	55,302

#### Identifying Volunteer Participants

This study followed a self-selecting sampling procedure where students enrolled in Professor Hooks' ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 courses were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. The researcher had visited Professor Hooks' classes and provided a brief explanation of the research study and offered to answer any questions that students had pertaining to the study. While the researcher was attending Professor Hooks' class to solicit volunteers to participate in the study, students were asked to complete the civic-engagement questionnaire (see Appendix A). All students attending class were provided this questionnaire, and people who completed the questionnaire and returned the form to the researcher were included in this phase of the data collection.

Students were asked to volunteer for the study by signing up for one of five scheduled focus-group times. Students were notified that those who participated in the study (who attended a focus group and completed the drawing activity) would be given a \$10.00 gift card to Target.

The use of incentives to encourage participation in a research study has demonstrated a modest increase in participation (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Because students were asked to participate in the study activities that included focus groups during non-classroom time and completed a drawing activity that did not have direct benefit to the participant, the \$10.00 Target gift card provided students a modest incentive to participate in the study.

The gift cards were given to students after they had completed the focus group and submitted a completed engagement-illustration response. The estimated time commitment was one hour for the focus group and approximately 15 minutes for the illustration activity. Most students who participated in the focus group submitted a completed drawing sample.

#### Sample Size

The sample size was determined to be 33 students who participated in five focus groups at the point of data saturation as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). After focus-group questions were developed from the civic-engagement questionnaire, the researcher established a better understanding of the nature of civic engagement which determines the scope of the research study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss assert determining a sample size and the number of groups for a research study is not necessary during the developmental phase of a qualitative-research study. Sample size should be determined by the quality and richness of the data collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) assert that a sample size is determined appropriate when data saturation occurs. Data saturation determines the sample size for a qualitative grounded-theory research study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data saturation occurs during the data collection and data-analysis phases of the study and is deemed as such when the researcher has collected no new data that can be used to develop the theory further (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After completing the fourth focus group the researcher concluded that no new themes had emerged as a result of the fourth group. The findings from the fourth focus group were consistent with the previous three focus groups. To ensure data saturation, the research conducted a fifth focus group to ensure no new themes would emerge. At the conclusion of the fifth focus group, the researcher became empirically confident that no new data could be found from recently collected data and discontinued sampling (Glaser & Strauss). For the purposes of this study, the research uses the definition provided by Glaser and Strauss for empirical confidence as a point in which the data collection process yields no new data despite the researcher making every possible attempt to “stretch the data” as far as possible include the widest range of data (Glaser & Strauss).

#### Sample Population Demographics

The following demographic information provides a breakdown of the sample population. Demographic sampling data were collected on the demographic supplemental form from students who were enrolled in Professor Hooks’ classes and participated in the study. In summary, the sample population of students who participated in the study is comparable to that of the larger college population. The only ethnicity that was not present in the sample population which is represented in the general population were students of Asian or Pacific Islander as indicated by the student demographic questionnaire.

### Gender of Sample Population

A total of 86 students completed the demographic information supplemental form that was distributed to students who had completed the student civic-engagement questionnaire. Some of the demographic information supplemental forms were incomplete when returned to the researcher, resulting in inconsistent totals for the demographic data. The gender distribution of this population is 51 female and 49 male students and is provided in figure four.

Table 4. Gender Distribution of Sample Population

Gender	Raw Total	Percentage
Male	39	49%
Female	41	51%
Total	80	

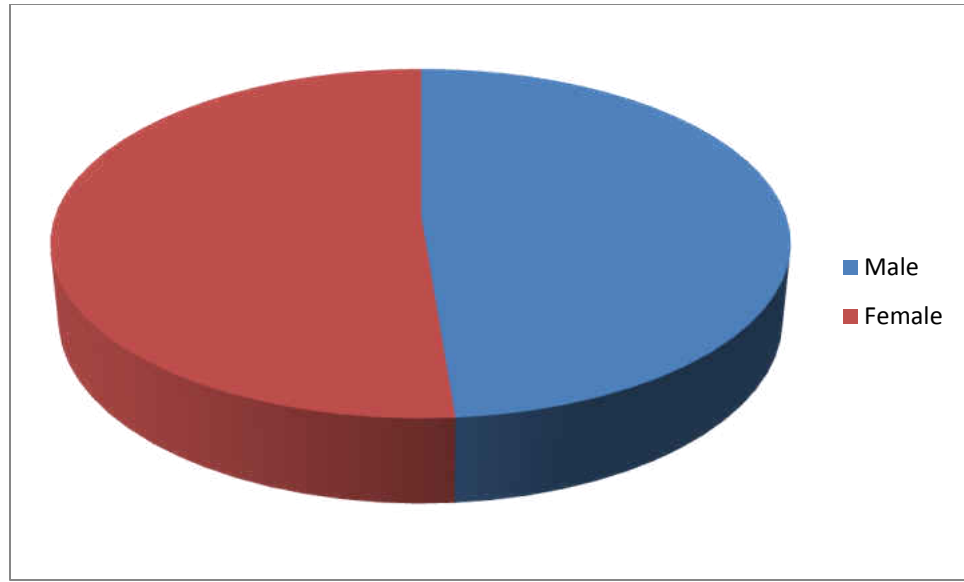


Figure 4 Gender Distribution of Sample Population

#### Ethnicity Distribution of Sample Population

A total of 86 students who participated in the study indicated their ethnicity as 15% African American, 35% Caucasian, 43% Hispanic, 0% Asian, and 7% Other.



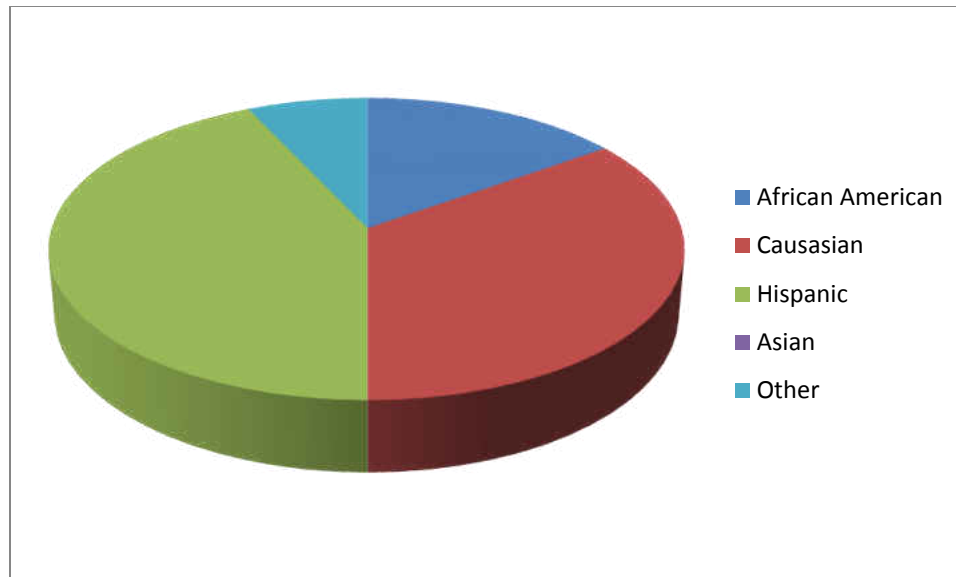


Figure 5 Ethnicity of Sample Population

Table 5. Breakdown of Ethnicity of Sample Population

Ethnicity	Raw Total	Percentage
African American	13	15%
Caucasian	30	35%
Hispanic	37	43%
Asian	0	0%
Other	6	7%
Total	86	

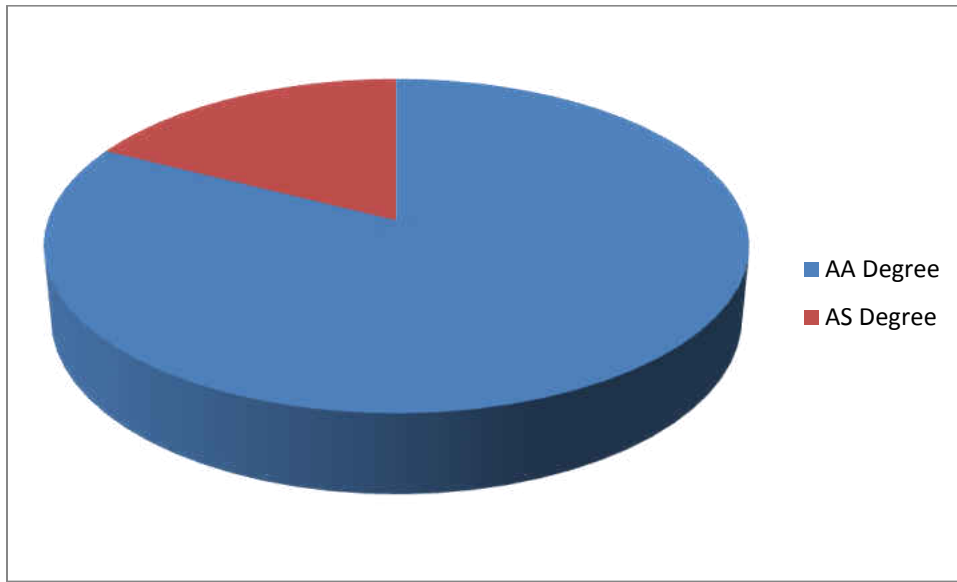


Figure 6 Degree-Seeking Status of Sample Population

A total of 80 students who participated in the study indicated their degree-seeking status as: 83% were Associate in Arts Degree-seeking, and 18% were Associate in Science Degree-seeking. At Wilson Community College, students who are seeking an Associate in Arts degree are typically intending on completing the first two years of a Bachelor's of Arts degree and will transfer to a state university or college to complete their four-year degree. Students who are seeking an Associate in Science degree will enter the workforce after graduating with their two-year degree. The focus of the Associate in Science degree is to prepare students with technical- and workforce-related skills for a specific occupation, e.g., Nursing, Radiological Sciences, Computer Engineering, Criminal Justice, Accounting Technology, etc.

Table 6. Degree-Seeking Status of Sample Population

	Raw Total	Percentage
Degree-Status		
AA Degree	66	83%
AS Degree	14	18%
Non-Degree		
Total	80	

A total of 71 students who participated in the study indicated their ages as: 18 years old and under: 23%; 19-20 years old: 46%; 21-24 years old: 21%; 25-34 years old: 7%; 35-44 years old: 0%; and 45 years old and over: 3%.

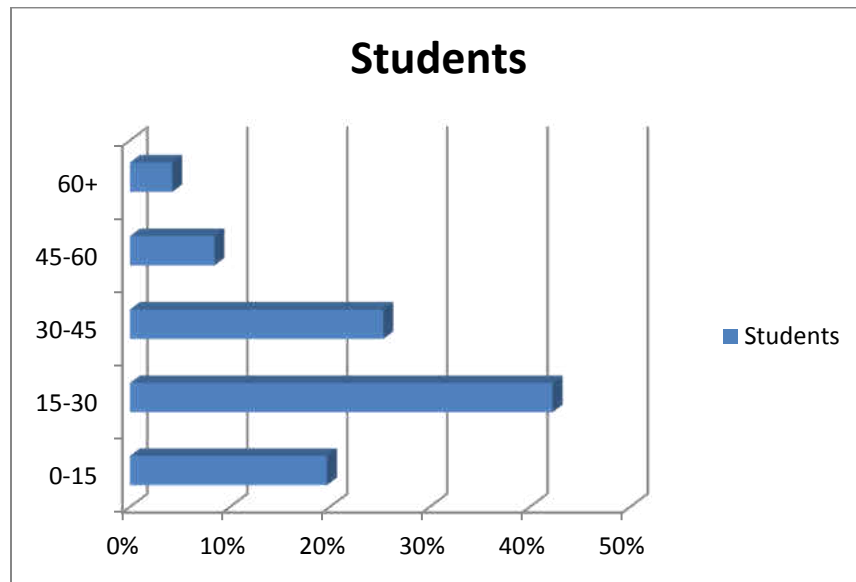


Figure 7 Age Distribution of Sample Population

Table 7. Breakdown of Age Distribution of Sample Population

Age	Raw	
	Total	Percentage
18 and under	16	23%
19-20	33	46%
21-24	15	21%
25-34	5	7%
35-44	0	0%
45 and over	2	3%
Total	71	

#### Data Collection

A qualitative-research approach was best suited for addressing this study’s research questions. The qualitative civic-engagement questionnaire and focus groups provided an open-ended question format to ask student participants to define civic engagement, describe their current level of engagement, and discuss activities they participate in at Wilson Community College. To avoid limiting the possible responses by students, the open-ended qualitative civic-engagement questionnaire format provided students with the opportunity to put into their own words what civic engagements means as well as, address the other research questions. Because of the fluid nature of civic engagement, the qualitative-research approach was open-ended, which was necessary to address the research questions.

Data were collected from three sources during the study: hand-written, open-response questions on the student civic-engagement questionnaire (Appendix A); focus-group discussions (Appendix C); and the civic-engagement drawing activity (Appendix F). The questionnaires were used to create the focus-group questions, following a grounded-theory approach to data analysis. The focus-group data and civic-engagement drawing activity provided multiple sources of data to triangulate and support the assertions made in Chapter Four.

### Questionnaires

The student civic-engagement questionnaire (Appendix A) asked students to define civic engagement, provide examples of how they are currently civically engaged, describe their current level of civic involvement, and relate their current level of engagement with their level of engagement from high school. Each question on the questionnaire specifically addressed one of the research questions for this study, and students were prompted to provide hand-written responses. The data collected from these open-ended responses provided students with an opportunity to answer questions anonymously; students were not asked to write their names on the civic-engagement questionnaires. A supplemental form was attached to the questionnaire asking students to provide demographic information that was used to compare the sample with the college population. This comparison was provided earlier in this chapter.

### Developing the Focus-Group Questions

The researcher visited Professor Hooks' ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 courses (six sections) in a standard classroom during regularly scheduled class time to distribute the civic-engagement questionnaires. All students who attended Professor Hooks' courses were asked to complete the

questionnaire, and students were provided the option to participate in this study. A total of 98 civic-engagement questionnaires were completed and collected from students. The responses from the questionnaires were used to formulate the focus-group questions (Appendix C). Using Glaser and Strauss’s Grounded Theory (1967) the responses to the questionnaires were analyzed to develop a focus group framework. The themes that emerged from the questionnaires provided the structure for the focus-group questions. The patterns that emerged from this data source are outlined below.

#### Development of Focus-Group Questions

Described below are the themes that emerged from the data recorded on the “Student Civic Engagement” questionnaire, which was analyzed using Glaser and Strauss’s Grounded Theory, approach to qualitative research.

Low Participators—The majority of students who completed a questionnaire felt they were low participators in civic-engagement activities.

Student cited the following reasons or barriers for their low civic engagement:

- A. Competing work and school commitments created issues.
- B. They were too busy and had no time for civic activities.
- C. Students indicated they had been more involved in high school because of class, scholarship, or graduation requirements or assignments.

- D. After graduating from high school, the students found that their responsibilities increased to include car payments, jobs, family responsibilities, etc.
- E. Students reported a lack of interest in politics and little sense of urgency to act civically.

College coursework—Students reported that college course work increased civic awareness through curriculum, e.g., environmental science courses.

Clubs and organizations—Students defined civic engagement as club and organizational involvement on campus, e.g., SGA, clubs, voter-registration drives, etc.

Addressing issues—Students provided examples that they considered working in groups or acting as individuals on issues of public concern, solving problems, and making a difference as civic engagement.

Volunteering—Students connected how volunteering through charity, church, YMCA, Red Cross, community-center programs, etc., provides a civic-engagement opportunity.

Community—Students looked for opportunities to make a difference in the community, help people in need within their local community, develop the community, and come together to solve issues in the community. The word “community” is repeated more frequently than any other word on the questionnaire.

News, Media and Awareness—Students connected the need to learn about topics and issues to become informed citizens. Students reported using internet and news sources to stay informed: a few mention Facebook and Twitter to stay connect to peers; and one mentioned using a blog to communicate opinions. Other students reported watching the news and reading magazines to stay informed.

Specific Movements and Causes—Students reported that they participated in several different movements or causes. Specific movements or protests they had attended, e.g., Occupy Orlando, Voter Registrations campaigns, [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org), etc., were mentioned.

Interactions—Students reported that the way people interact with each other, come together as a society, and come together to help people in groups or individually who are in need was the foundation to all civic activities.

Jobs and Career—Several students made a connection between their job or occupation, their major, current, or future employment, and civic engagement.

Political Engagement—Student specified political activities that involve government such as: voting, registering to vote, campaigning for candidates, being involved in local and regional government, following laws, participating in political parties, and supporting the government.



### Focus-Group Procedures

The researcher reserved a standard classroom at Wilson Community College for use during the focus-group sessions and for the student civic-engagement drawing activity. The rooms were scheduled during a variety of weekdays and times that included morning and afternoons to accommodate the students' schedules. After all volunteer participants gathered in the classroom the researcher provided a brief explanation of the second phase of the research study: the focus group and the civic-engagement drawing activity. The researcher conducted a total of five focus groups with a total of 33 student participants averaging between six and seven students for each focus group.

The researcher explained the focus of the research study and provided details on how the focus group would be conducted. General guidelines on how focus groups are facilitated were explained, and a few ground rules were established. Guidelines included items such as: everyone's opinion is important; there are no right or wrong answers to the questions; the data collected will be used for research purposes; and the students' participation is strictly voluntary, etc. All students who elected to participate in the study were given a consent form (Appendix D). This study was deemed exempt from full IRB review by the IRB office by both the University and Wilson Community College, due to the nature of the research. Students were also provided a research-study explanation letter (Appendix E). After reviewing the consent form and answering any questions, the researcher began audio recording the discussion and started the focus group.

### Focus Groups

The focus groups were conducted by the researcher and lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes each. After all student participants had reported to the room, the researcher reviewed the research study, handed out the consent forms and research explanation letters and reviewed these documents thoroughly. The researcher answered any questions the students had pertaining to the study and the documents distributed. The focus-group conversations were audio recorded, and the files kept on a secured hard drive until they were completely transcribed by the researcher. This allowed the researcher time to become intimately familiar and saturated in the focus-group data as the files were transcribed. This proved to be very helpful in coding and analyzing the data. In the process of transcribing the audio files, all participants were assigned pseudonyms for reporting purposes.

The focus-group discussions were conducted by the researcher and followed a predetermined focus-group framework (Appendix C). The focus-group framework outlines the questions and the progression of the questions from the beginning to the end of the focus group. Even though the principal researcher was equipped with a framework with questions themed from the questionnaire (Appendix B), the conversation was not structured to force responses to support the researchers predetermined hypothesis (Glaser, 1992). The researcher purposefully suspended a hypothesis. Focus-group questions, while empirically connected to the topic, were not directed toward a specific data or response (Glaser, 1992).

The researcher allowed flexibility within the discussion as the conversations evolved. While a well-structured focus-group framework was created (with questions) in advance, all questions naturally materialized during the course of the focus group as students discussed civic

engagement. Every effort was made to not directly ask questions that would lead to preconceived answers (Glaser, 1992). In a Grounded Theory approach, the research should “never, never” ask a question with intent to collect preconceived data. The data should emerge, unforced and naturally, from the research (Glaser, 1992). This was the case with the fluid approach of the focus groups. While all focus groups started with a general open-ended question, such as “How do you define civic engagement?” or “Tell me a little bit about what civic engagement means to you,” these open-ended questions provided participants an open format to discuss civic engagement without leading questions. As the conversation evolved, the focus group would naturally bring up the themes that emerged from the questionnaire data, and the researcher took this opportunity to ask follow-up questions to clarify the students’ thoughts and ideas.

Glaser (1992) recommends “think theory, talk everyday common sense English” while conducting qualitative research. The researcher frequently adopted terms used by students in the focus group and used active listening skills to encourage an exhaustive conversation. The use of “everyday... English” is critical when conducting qualitative research (Glaser, 1992). While each focus group seemed to be chaotic and unstructured due to the nature of the Grounded Theory approach, all five focus groups evolved, covering the themes found within the questionnaires as students reported variations with common themes of data. Even though the order of the questions varied from focus group to focus group, the framework provided a guideline for the researcher to follow that ensured all questions were asked of all five focus

groups, and by the end of each group session, all the themes had been discussed by the participants.

#### Student Civic-Engagement Drawing Activity

At the conclusion of the focus-group sessions, students were asked to complete a drawing activity. Students were provided a sheet of paper that provided a simple drawing response (Appendix F) prompting students to create an drawing which explained their definition of civic engagement at the community college. Participants were provided with crayons and colored pencils for this activity. Students were provided as much time as they needed and were free to leave the focus group when they had completed their drawing. Participants generally completed the activity in five to ten minutes.

Several students commented on their lack of artistic ability. The researcher reassured these students that they were not being graded on their artistic ability and encouraged them to “do the best” they could and use text or narratives to describe what was happening in the drawings, if they felt this would help the researcher better understand their intentions.

#### Data-Analysis Procedures and Saturation

Data analysis for the qualitative open-response civic-engagement questionnaire, the focus-group sessions, and the civic-engagement drawing activity followed the systematic Grounded Theory approach to qualitative data-analysis established by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Focus-group transcription began immediately after the first focus group and was critical to the coding and analysis of the data. By the conclusion of the third focus group and drawing activity, the researcher could detect patterns within the data (Glaser, 1992). Despite

the emergence of patterns in the data, the researcher scheduled two more focus groups to ensure data saturation that was confirmed by the end of the fourth focus group, as no new data codes or categories could be found within the data. Because a fifth focus group was already scheduled, the fifth group was facilitated and included in the data.

After the researcher completely transcribed all five of the focus-group sessions, the researcher coded the data, which led to generating categories within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2006). The researcher reviewed the transcript, developed codes for each of the examples, critically considered the text and intent of the discussion, and worked to establish patterns within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). As patterns developed, the researcher established categories to organize the examples provided by students (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). The categories served as themes that became the basis for the seven assertions presented in Chapter Four. Each of the assertions are supported by examples from the focus groups and the student civic-engagement drawing activity.

#### Questionnaire Data-Analysis Procedures

All student civic-engagement questionnaires were duplicated, using a standard office copy machine. The questionnaire copies were reviewed by the researcher to establish codes, concepts which emerge from the collected data. Following the Grounded Theory approach, after codes had been established, the researcher reviewed the questionnaire responses a second time and assigned all responses to one of the established codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). In the third step of the data-analysis process, each code was reviewed to ensure responses were properly coded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). After all responses had been

coded and confirmed, larger categories linked common codes (Moustakas,1994). The questionnaires were reviewed, coded, and categorized prior to the focus-group sessions to establish the focus-group questions.

Immediately after the conclusion of the focus-group sessions, the researcher transcribed the audio files in preparation for data analysis. During the data-analysis, process the researcher established codes within the data associated with individual themes that represent major themes as reported by the student participants. The researcher identified codes that represented major concepts emerging from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). After codes had been established, the researcher reviewed the focus-group transcripts a second time and assigned all responses to one of the established codes (Glaser & Straus; Moustakas, 1994). In the third step of the data-analysis process, each code was reviewed to ensure responses were properly coded. After all transcripts had been coded and confirmed, larger categories linked common codes, and vignettes within the data were identified to tell the story of civic engagement (Moustakas, 1994).

A rubric was created that included the themes from the questionnaires to aid in analyzing the illustrations submitted by the students during the drawing activity (Appendix H). In a 1997 study, Fournier and Wineburg used student drawings to better understand how students depict historical figures. Fournier and Wineburg created guidelines to analyze the drawings and sort them into categories. This research study followed a modified version of Fournier and Wineburg's drawing-analysis approach by using the established themes discovered from the questionnaires. All student drawings were analyzed following a grounded-theory approach to

categorizing the illustrations and text found within each drawing. In this research study, all the student drawings were reviewed and placed into categories; in some cases, illustrations were placed into more than one category. Much like Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory approach to qualitative-data analysis, the pictures were coded and placed into themes. The themes then were sorted into larger categories. The pictures provided by student were used to support the assertions and themes established from the focus groups.

#### Data-Analysis Summary

All three data sources (student questionnaires, focus groups, and student drawing samples) have been analyzed using the grounded-theory approach and have been triangulated to establish an understanding civic engagement at Wilson Community College.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This research study examined how students at Wilson Community College defined civic engagement, their perceived level of engagement within their community, and how the college coursework and environment encouraged their civic engagement. As a result of a comprehensive review of the literature, the researcher found that four research questions emerged:

1. How do Wilson Community College students define civic engagement?
2. How are Wilson Community College students civically engaged on campus and in the community?
3. How does the Wilson Community College curriculum affect the students' level of civic engagement?
4. How has Wilson Community College coursework (curriculum) affected students' attitudes and perceptions about civic engagement during a student's two-year program?

The initial data collection process involved the student civic engagement questionnaire (Appendix A). Described below are the themes that emerged from the data recorded on the "Student Civic Engagement" questionnaire, which was analyzed using Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory approach to qualitative research.

#### Significant Themes

Low Participators—The majority of students who completed a questionnaire felt they are low participators in civic-engagement activities.



Student cited the following reasons or barriers for their low civic engagement.

- A. Competing work and school commitments created issues.
- B. They were too busy and had no time for civic activities.
- C. Students indicated they had been more involved in high school because of class, scholarship, or graduation requirements or assignments.
- D. After graduating from high school, the students found that their responsibilities increased to include car payments, jobs, family responsibilities, etc.
- E. Students reported a lack of interest in politics and little sense of urgency to act civically.

Students reported a lack of interest in politics and little sense of urgency to act civically.

College coursework—Students reported that college coursework increased civic awareness through curriculum, e.g., environmental science courses.

Clubs and organizations—Students defined civic engagement as club and organizational involvement on campus, e.g., SGA, clubs, voter-registration drives, etc.

Addressing issues—Students provided examples that they considered working in groups or acting as individuals on issues of public concern, solving problems, and making a difference as civic engagement.

Volunteering—Student connected how volunteering through charity, church, YMCA, Red Cross, community-center programs provides a civic-engagement opportunity.

Community—Student looked for opportunities to make a difference in the community, help people in need within their local community, develop the community, coming together to solve issues in the community. The word “community” is repeated more frequently than any other word on the questionnaire.

News, Media and Awareness—Students connected the need to learn about topics and issues to become informed citizens. Students reported using internet and news sources to stay informed, a few mention Facebook and Twitter to stay connect to peers and one mentioned using a blog to communicate their opinion. Other students reported watching the news and reading magazines to stay informed.

Specific Movements and Causes—Students reported that they participated in several different movements or causes. Specific movements or protests they had attended, e.g. Occupy Orlando, Voter Registrations campaigns, [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org), etc., were mentioned.

Interactions—Students reported that the way people interact with each other, come together as a society, and come together to help people in groups or individually who are in need was the foundation to all civic activities.

Jobs and Career—Several students made a connection between their job or occupation, their major, current, or future employment, and civic engagement.

Political Engagement—Student specified political activities that involve government such as: voting, registering to vote, campaigning for candidates, being involved in local

and regional government, following laws, participating in political parties, and supporting the government.

The themes described above from the initial data collection source (Student Civic Engagement Questionnaire) were used to guide the focus group conversations. As a result of this research study, both the initial data collected from the Student Civic Engagement Questionnaire, the focus groups and student drawing activity; five assertions emerged. All the three data sources were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory research design. Providing insight to how students at Wilson Community College understand civic engagement, these five assertions show that students distinguished between two forms of civic engagement, political and non-political engagement; family and school are the two primary sources of learning civic-engagement skills and tendencies; civic engagement involves interpersonal interactions among people and groups with an issues-based approach to improving the community; students connect career and occupational interests to civic activities; and students identify as low participators due to barriers to engagement. The five assertions are described below:

1. Students delineated civic engagement into two categories, political and non-political engagement.
2. Civic engagement is learned from the family and at school.
3. Interpersonal interaction between people and groups is the foundation for civic engagement that is commonly centered on issues found within the community.

4. Career and occupational interests and experiences influence a student's involvement in civic activities.
5. Students identify as having low civic engagement. When asked why students reflect on being more civically engaged in high school because of the incentives to volunteer, the students listed several barriers existing with their ability to be more civically engaged.

These assertions are further discussed in this chapter to present a better understanding of civic engagement at the community college. The assertions are supported by statements made by students during the focus groups and evidence collected from the civic engagement drawing activity. These data sources establish a theory on community college civic engagement at Wilson Community College. To provide anonymity to the students whom participated in this study, pseudonyms have been used in place of the students' names.

### Assertion One

*Students delineated civic engagement into two categories, political and non-political engagement.*

When asked to define and further discuss civic engagement, students categorized civic-engagement activities into two different spheres: political and non-political engagement.

- a. Political engagement included participation in political activities that directly involve the governance of their local communities, e.g., municipal government and state and national government. Examples of political engagement included voting; staying informed about issues pertaining to their local, regional, and statewide communities, national politics; and writing to their congressional representatives.
- b. Non-political engagement included activities where students are involved in their local community groups, e.g., church, clubs, organizations, school, etc., where interpersonal interactions with people provide a social opportunity that frequently allows participants to help others in the community through volunteering and performing other service activities.

Both political and nonpolitical engagement will be discussed in greater detail individually. The first category of civic engagement, designated as political engagement, resembles a traditional form that includes citizenship involvement in voting for government officials: contacting a members of the congressional staff about issues and concerns at the local, regional, and national level: attending community meetings (city or county commission meetings); working with others in their community to “solve issues that have to do with the

masses,” e.g., “health care, unemployment, and schooling for kids,” and identifying with a particular political party (Christopher, focus group, November 1, 2011).

The second form of civic engagement, designated as non-political engagement, included activities which were non-political or did not intend on impacting the governance of the nation or region. Activities include taking care of people in the neighborhood, volunteering, giving back to society. Student participants discussed volunteering in great detail. Students believed that volunteering provided civic-engagement opportunity that students report as both tangible and rewarding. Students reported how teachers and guidance counselors, as well as parents, encouraged volunteering. Within a school setting, students were encouraged to volunteer and were frequently provided incentives for their volunteering hours. Students reported learning from their parents the importance and urgency of serving the community. Veteran students who had served in the military learned from their service experience the importance of volunteering and giving back to the local community. Across all groups of students, volunteering is seen as an important activity and provides opportunity to give back to the community and improve society.

Student who participated in this study reported that political engagement was directly connected to government and the development of laws to improve the country. The data collected explained the role citizens play in improving society through their work and actions. For example, Ron, who grew up on the west side of the city in which Wilson Community College is located, described how his mother identified a need within the local community and worked with others in the community to provide a solution when he was in elementary school.

Each day on his walk to attend a school located in his neighborhood, Ron had to cross a busy street. At that time, the county did not provide a crossing guard to help the children cross the street. Through the proper channels at the local school and school district level, Ron's mother and other concerned parents worked together to address this issue. As a result of their work, a designated crossing area was created, and a crossing guard was hired to help students cross the street (Ron, focus group, November 17, 2011).

Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins & Delli-Carpini (2006) in their book *A New Engagement*, define political engagement as citizen involvement in governance of the nation. Zukin et.al. described political engagement in traditional terms where involved citizens are actively involved in governmental processes e.g. voting, attending local municipal and county governmental meetings, and write to legislators and the president to demonstrate their support and concerns for laws. Zukin et al., argue this traditional form of civic participation is frequently how older generations of citizens define civic engagement. While this research study did not delineate a generational difference in civic engagement which was discussed by Zukin et al., a clear delineation between the two forms of civic engagement emerged from the data collected.

The findings of this research study supported the work of Zukin et al., (2006) that civic engagement should be defined in broader terms than the traditional notion that civic engagement is only political in nature. Zukin et al., provides a foundation for better understanding civic engagement in the general population. Adding to the work of Zukin et al., this research study adds to the literature on civic education. Specifically this research study provides a better understanding of civic engagement within the community college population and involved a

thoughtful investigation of how students define civic engagement. The findings of Zukin et al., supports the first assertion made by this research study that community college students define civic engagement in both political and non-political terms.

Evidence of Zukin et al., 2006 assertion that civic engagement is influenced by generational difference within society was found within the research study. Christopher, a nontraditional student who is a veteran of the first Gulf War, discussed how citizens within his neighborhood worked with the local government to build additional sidewalks in their community. Christopher stated that many of the residents are elderly, describing his neighborhood as a “peacock” community, and the accessibility of sidewalks improved the mobility for the elderly in the area (Christopher, focus group, November 1, 2011). Christopher discussed in detail how others in his neighborhood work toward identifying issues within the community and work through political systems to address these issues.

Christopher’s example supports the assertion made by Zukin et al., 2006 that generational differences impact a citizen’s definition of civic engagement. Zukin et al., established that past generations e.g. traditionalist, baby boomers, generation X and DotNet generations defined civic engagement in terms which were characterized by their experiences during their life. Based on these well established and defined generations, Zukin et al., outline how the life experiences of these generations impact their understanding of civic engagement. Christopher, a non-traditional student, defined civic engagement in traditional terms which aligned with the research findings by Zukin et al., for his generation. Christopher, who considered himself as a baby boomer, defined civic engagement in traditional terms which is common for his generation (Zukin et al.).



While Christopher, a Baby Boomer defined civic engagement as political engagement, younger students also held this belief. Jessica, a first time in college student who is a Dot Net generation aged student defined civic engagement in traditional political terms. Jessica described her efforts to help a city-council candidate become elected in a municipal election. She discussed her participation in the candidate's campaign activities. She attended city council meetings to show her support for this political candidate and later worked on his campaign by helping to raise money and support (Jessica, focus group, November 1, 2011). Jessica participated in this candidate's campaign because the candidate represented her local community and because she agreed with his political views. Jessica implied that her parents had a significant influence on her participation in these civic activities. Additionally Jessica demonstrated that generational differences were not the only factor which impacted their definition and understanding of civic engagement. Jessica's life experiences and opportunities, as well as the type of parental support she received impacted her sense of civic engagement. Indirectly generational differences could have influenced her civic engagement, as her parents were likely Baby Boomers.

Derek supported the examples provided by Jessica. Derek had also attended a local city-commission meeting to show support for a municipal election candidate. He had attended the city council meeting to "hand out information" and "had parades and stuff to support him, so he could be elected" (Derek, focus group, November 22, 2011). Derek reported that this candidate was someone he supported and worked within the political arena to provide support for this candidate.

The drawing activity data further supports this assertion that students identify civic engagement as political activities. The following picture demonstrates a student's definition of civic engagement as activities that include political activities. This drawing includes a group of people waiting in line at a polling precinct, with a predominately displayed United States' flag in the foreground and other citizens encouraging people to vote. The act of voting was likely the most mentioned form of political civic engagement across all data sources: questionnaires, focus groups, and the drawing activity. This illustration also has an emphasis on the interpersonal relationships among people. The predominate presence of the word "vote" demonstrated a political focus for civic activities in this particular illustration.

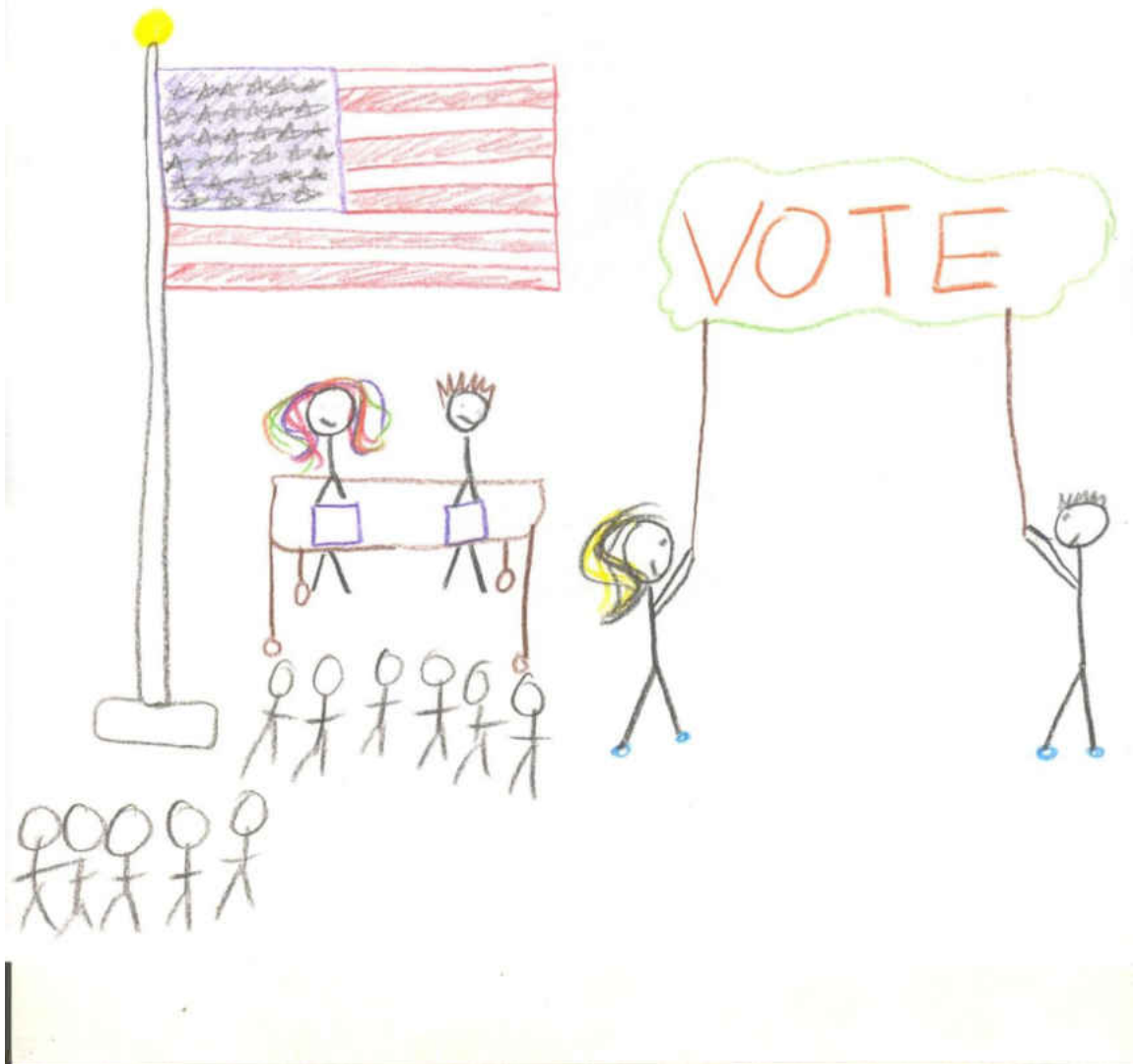


Figure 8: VOTING

The second form of civic engagement that was discussed by students in the focus groups, as well as the questionnaires, was non-political—helping people in their local community, e.g., volunteering at a soup kitchen, donating to causes (Red Cross, blood bank, Coalition for the Homeless, etc.), and identify problems within their neighborhood that can be solved in non-political activities such as working with homeowners association to improve neighborhoods.

Mikala discussed a time when she lived in a neighborhood that experienced “a lot of break-ins,” and the people within the community created a community-watch program (Mikala, focus group, November 3, 2012).

A primary form of non-political civic engagement is the act of volunteering or other unofficial methods of helping people in the community. In each of the focus groups, students discussed a variety of ways that they acted civically in a non-political way. Volunteering was the preferred civic activity. Students favored volunteering because it provided them with tangible evidence of how their service improved the community and because they were “encouraged in high school” (Ron, focus group, November 17, 2011). Additionally, students do not draw a connection to the political process and their daily life. Because of this disconnect, students are discouraged from participating as Paul reported “because we don’t think being involved in politics really affects us” (Paul, focus group, November 17, 2011).

Kyle further discussed his lack of interest in politics and his interest in non-political activities, such as volunteering. Kyle stated “I would have to say I’m going to be a low participator at least for the next couple of years because I just don’t see how it connects to me as a young person. As much as I wish that I could, I just don’t see how this is relevant to me, and when they talk to me I don’t feel like you’re being 100% honest to me in politics. But in civic engagement like volunteering I see it just going up and up because I see the effects that it has” (Kyle, focus group, November 17, 2011). Kyle’s statement reflects the fear held by many civic educators and leaders today; that students and young citizens are not civically engaged because they feel disconnected from politics.

Civic educators, social scientist and political leaders have expressed a concern for civic engagement as young citizens have demonstrated a disconnect from political activities e.g. voting, and have shown distrust of elected officials (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003). Since the 1990's researchers have reported a decline in the level of civic engagement which is underlined with statements from concerned citizens (CIRCLE & Carnegie). Kyle's statement from the focus group supports the literature which asserts that young people are becoming disconnected with politics as a result of their discontent and distrust in government.

The delineation between political and non-political engagement emerged from the questionnaire responses and became a predominate discussion within the focus groups. Across all focus groups, students discussed in great length the differences between these two primary forms of civic engagement. This assertion is also supported by the drawing activity data. The following picture demonstrates how students delineated between two primary forms of civic engagement, political and non-political engagement. In the upper right hand corner of the drawing, the "I Voted" sticker or button is iconic with the act of voting in the United States and is a familiar sight to people on Election Day. Below the "I Voted" sticker is a building where homeless or needy people are being fed. This portion of the drawing includes elements of interpersonal interaction among a diverse group of people who are needy.

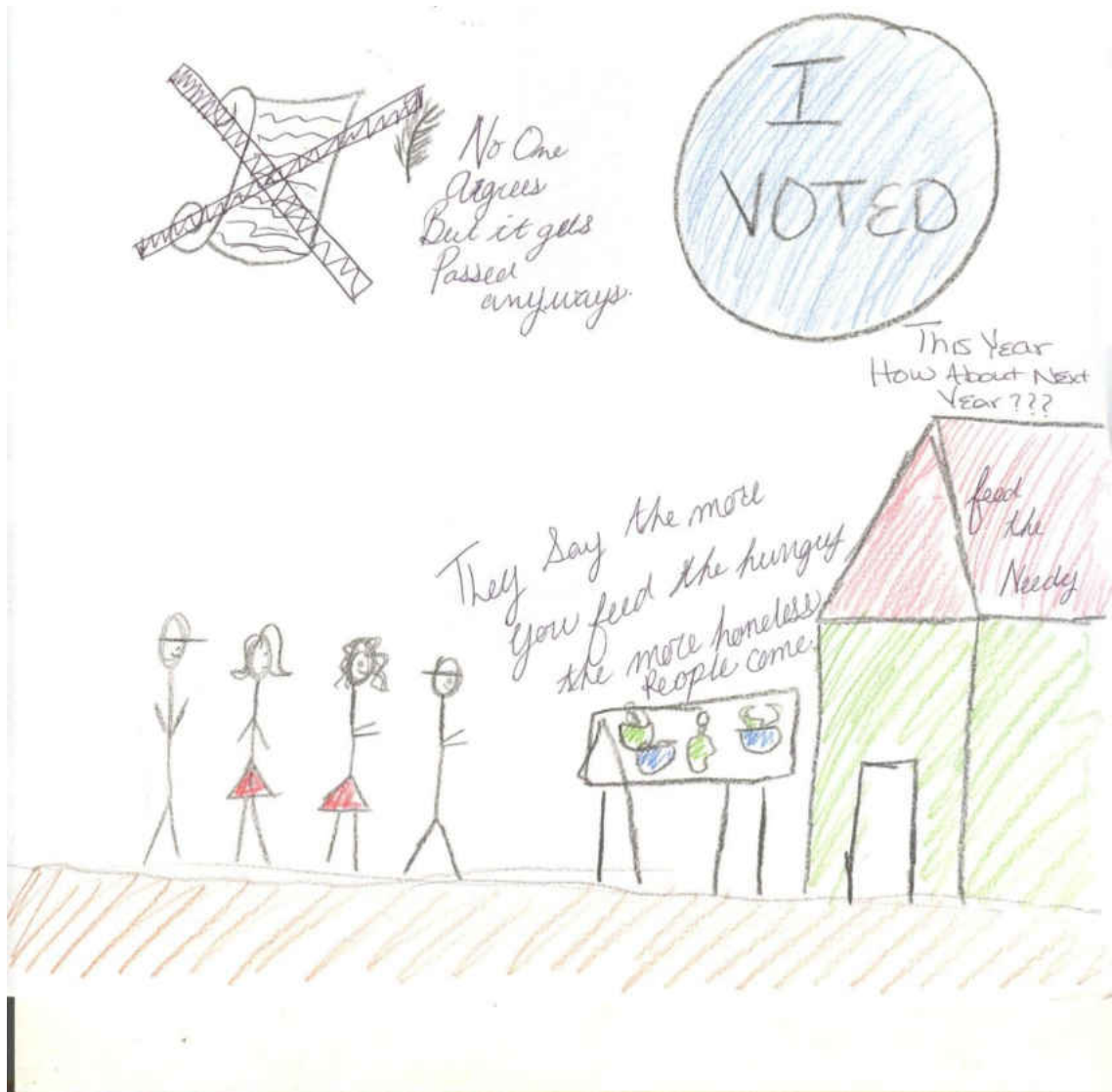


Figure 9: VOTING AND FEEDING THE NEEDY

An additional element found within this drawing and present in the focus groups, despite not emerging as a significant theme, was a sense of doubt in the legislative process. This drawing illustrates a bill that was passed in law yet was unpopular to the masses as described by the passage “no one agrees but it gets passed anyway.” This statement aligns with comments made during a focus-group discussion where Mike was doubtful that the politicians understood

the real needs of the citizens. This drawing was the only one to display skepticism in the political process. This skepticism has led to young citizens increasingly becoming distrustful of the political process (CIRCLE & Carnegie, 2003). Students' general lack of understanding of the political process adds to this distrust in government and elected officials (CIRCLE & Carnegie).

Of the 31 drawings collected from students, 77% of the pictures illustrated delineation between political and non-political civic engagement. The political and non-political theme is the second most frequently present theme within the 31 drawings collected in the study. Students consistently illustrated a clear distinction between these two forms of civic engagement. This data support the findings of the focus groups that students think of civic engagement in a multifaceted way. The drawing activity overwhelmingly supported the first assertion that community college students define civic engagement in both political and non-political terms shows how multifaceted and dynamic the idea of civic engagement is to citizens. Below is an example of a drawing where students recognized both political and non-political activities as civic engagement.

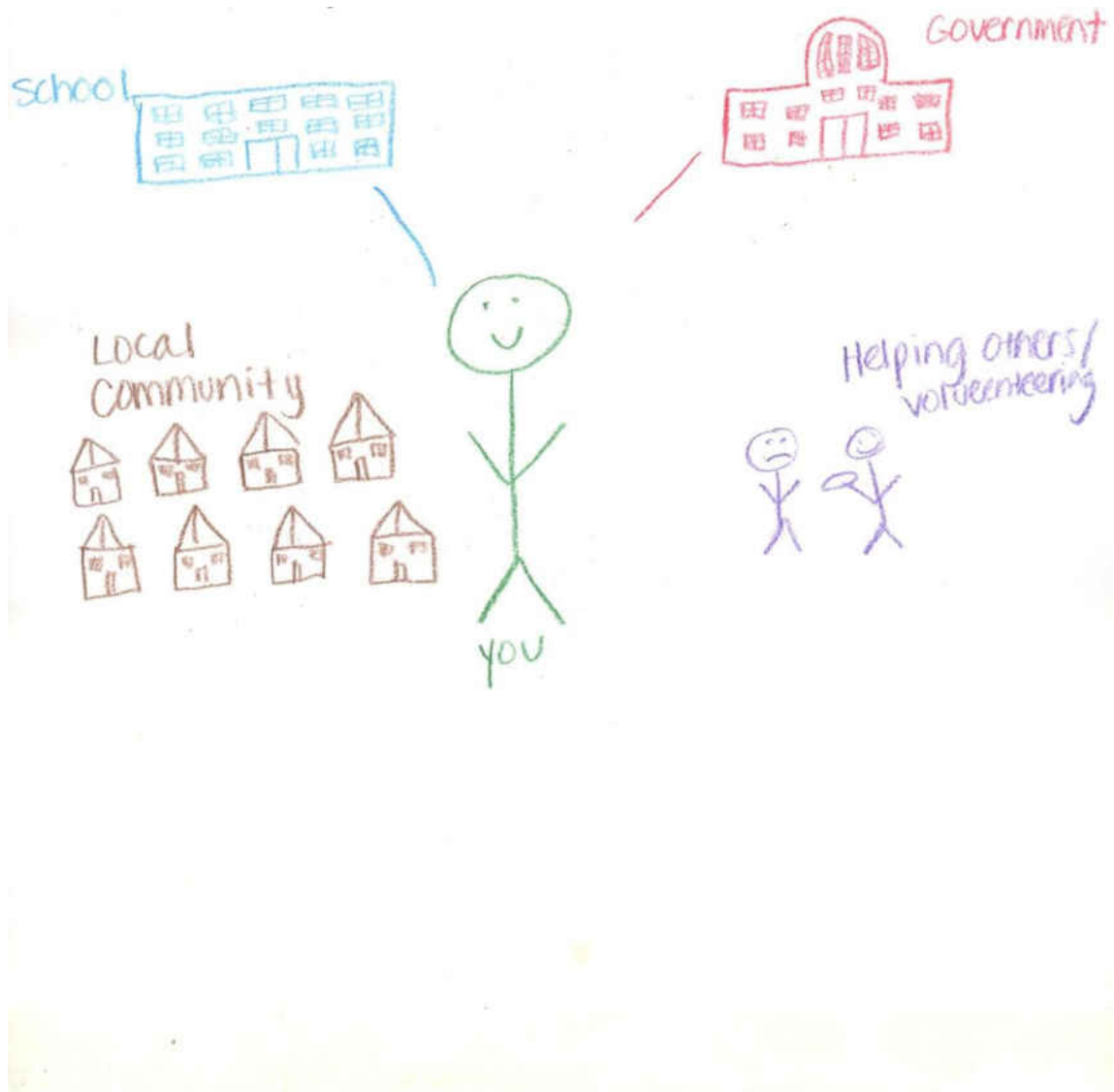


Figure 10: HELPING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT



In *A New Engagement*, Zukin et al. (2006) assert there has been a shift in civic engagement among generations. This shift has resulted in redefining civic engagement by the youngest U.S. citizens who are labeled as Millennials. Zukin et al., assert that Millennial students have become increasingly distrustful of government and focused their civic efforts on activities such as volunteering. This research study supports the assertions of Zukin et al., The shift is evident in the research study as the primary focus of the student participants discussed non-political engagement rather than the traditional political engagement. In the course of the five focus groups, as the students discussed the variety of ways they are civically engaged, as they honed their definition of civic engagement, each group independently delineated a difference between two forms of civic engagement: political and non-political engagement. In all five focus groups, the students indicated a difference in their engagement level between the two types, whether it was admitted overtly or implied by their answers.

Both Zukin et al., (2006) as well as this research study discovered a preference for young citizens, and in this case, community college students, to participate in non-political civic activities. Specifically, many students who participated in this study reported an interest in volunteering as a form of civic engagement. Students believed that an important part of civic engagement was helping others within the community through both formal volunteering and informal activities. The formal volunteering activities included volunteering with organizations such as volunteering at the local blood bank, helping to staff charity runs, adopting highway projects, and volunteering through high school clubs and organizations, e.g., Key Club. Informal

volunteering involved helping elderly people in their community with mobility issues around their homes.

Zukin et al., (2006) reported how the general population has a complicated definition and sense of civic engagement which is also the case of the community college population who participated in this study. Zukin et al., argued to better understand the current level of civic engagement researchers must understand how people define engagement which varies across populations and generations. Data collected in during this study supports these claims by Zukin et al and provided a good starting point in the focus group discussion. The researcher began all five focus groups asking student participants to define in their own words what civic engagement meant to them. By asking the students to define civic engagement, the students were able to provide a clearer picture of how they are engaged which provided a data rich source of information and clearer understanding of civic engagement.

Volunteering was a significant theme across all focus groups. All students discussed how volunteering improves their local community, provided a connection to civic engagement, and discussed how volunteering exposed students to a tangible way of making a real difference in their community. Additionally, students who had recently graduated from high school, within the past three to four years, indicated a difference in volunteering level between high school and college. While in high school students, were encouraged and, in some cases required to volunteer for graduation. Across all focus groups, students indicated a higher rate of volunteering while attending high school compared to when attending college.

When student participants were asked why there was a difference between their level of engagement in high school and college, students consistently report that they experienced a greater level of support and encouragement to participate in civic activities while in high school. Additionally, students reported that they had more time to participate in civic activities. Students consistently responded they had more time in high school to participate, they were encouraged by high school teachers and guidance counselors, and several mentioned that they were required to volunteer for graduation or to obtain scholarships. Additionally, students reported that while in high school, fewer barriers existed to their involvement. Mikala, who described herself as being very active in high school as a cheerleader and student-government leader, stated that her high school teachers “pushed” her to be involved and volunteer. Mikalla’s statements resembled those of other students who felt that the high school environment was more supportive of their civic development. Students reported that the barriers to civic engagement increased as students attended college.

Mikalla described how she and her classmates would “get lazy, we (would) get really lazy. Like in high school you know they (teachers and guidance counselors) push you to do these things. ... You know it’s a requirement so when you are introduced to it you end up liking it, instead of not liking and shying away from it, you know when you don’t have to do it and nobody’s reminding you about it and reminding you about it, you forget it was fun back in the day.” Mikalla indicated this pushing from her school administrators and teachers was what she needed to become civically engaged and, as a result, described herself as more civically engaged in high school than she was currently while in college. She later stated, “I think community

colleges really enforce civic engagement. [However] Wilson Community College just doesn't have it together with their groups. Their groups are not out there. [If] you go to UCF ... they are in the middle of the grass with their megaphones and they are getting their causes riled up" (Mikala, focus group, November 9, 2011).

Mike, a first time in college student who had served in Afghanistan, agreed that Wilson Community College could plan events to better encourage student participation in civic activities. Mike believed that the college should plan better to inform students earlier about campus events that promote civic engagement so that students could find time in their schedules. Mike stated "If they [Wilson Community College students] could plan accordingly and people could plan then people could a lot time and shade out your schedule. I've got work, school test(s); I have to study for and two days is not enough notice for me..." to attend these events which promote civic engagement. Mike was interested in volunteering but was reluctant about getting involved without having more information about the volunteering opportunities and had not been encouraged by the college's attempts to promote such programs (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).

Each of the focus groups discussed the numerous barriers to volunteering that included lack of time, resources, and information. Mikalla reported that she was not able to volunteer because she needed money to pay for gas to drive to and from places where she would be interested in volunteering. Mikalla stated that her main "focus now was finding a job" and working toward moving out of her father's house so that she could have more freedom and flexibility with her schedule. Mikalla disclosed that living with her father meant she had to

comply with his rules, implying there was a curfew: “You know it’s his house, his rules” (Mikala, focus group, November 9, 2011). Mikalla shared a common barrier which was common among other community college students. In order for Mikalla to spend time volunteering she had to work less. Mikalla was a reminder that many community college students had to work to support their education and other responsibilities.

For Mike, volunteering meant that he needed to have more information about the organization. Mike was reluctant to become involved with an organization without knowing more about their work and values. While stationed in Afghanistan, Mike frequently donated blood to help the injured on the “front line.” He felt that this civic activity made a direct benefit. As a result of his research, Mike had discovered that the Red Cross sold blood, “which I think is BS because if you’re gonna have people donate blood, it should be given freely to the hospital. I understand all the stuff they have to pay for, but seriously?” Mike preferred that his work and efforts, in this case his blood, would be freely donated to people in need. He would research the organization to understand how their efforts were used, before he committed to volunteering (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).

Mike expressed concern that Wilson Community College could do more to inform students about the types of opportunities to become civically engaged at the community college. Mike felt that “they [Wilson Community College] should inform everyone of all the different groups rather than just picking or being biased for one group or one group has been more active than the others, rather than as trying to find it by ourselves or just seeing as one side. They

[students] don't really know what is going on so they should inform everybody about or to make the information be accessible to the students" (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).

In all five focus groups students discussed how, in college, they were not being encouraged by their teachers to volunteer. To become eligible for the state-funded college scholarship program, students were required to volunteer, and in some cases, volunteering was a requirement for graduation from high school. These incentives-based systems were well established in the high school but are largely absent from the college experience. Despite being a requirement, which some students reported as a challenge or nuisance to complete, was rewarding. Mikalla said schools "sort of force you to do [volunteer] it if you're in school but it is very rewarding." These incentives provide students with the opportunity to become civically engaged in their local communities and give back (Mikala, focus group, November 9, 2011).

When asked why students had a tendency to volunteer over other civic political-engagement activities, students expressed how their volunteering made a more direct and tangible impact on their local community. Students preferred volunteering because they had witnessed the impact their work had on people in their community, and they felt good about giving back to a community; additionally, two students in different focus groups indicated that they had been helped by the community in the past. One student discussed having been homeless has led to her volunteering for the Coalition for the Homeless to help others in need. She talked about feeding a congregation of homeless people in a local park within the college's city limit (Katie, focus group, November 3, 2011).

In addition, students favored volunteering over political participation because of their lack of confidence in the political system. While discussing a general lack of interest in political engagement, Brian stated that “some people feel as though what they do doesn’t make a difference when it comes to stuff like politics. It’s like you don’t really feel like even when you do vote or you write your senator how do you know they get it? You don’t feel like you’re making (a difference).” Peter added “like a drop in a bucket,” indicating that they did not think their opinions mattered in politics. Brian, Jessica, and Peter all expressed their discouragement for the traditional engagement in politics at the state and national level and expressed an interest in non-political engagement such as volunteering and participating in other efforts to improve their local community. This phenomenon is supported by work of other researchers in the area of civic engagement.

Two groups, when posed the question, “What is your current level of civic engagement in terms of both political and non-political engagement?” indicated a difference in their levels by the type. The other three groups measured their level of engagement as being equal across both the two types; however, they spent the majority of time discussing how they are non-politically engaged. Students seemed to mention out of habit voting and contacting governmental officials (congress, president, local government officials) and lacked the intimate details and examples of how they are non-politically engaged through their communities, volunteering, having membership in organizations, and helping people in need. Despite students stating they are politically engaged, few eligible to vote had voted during the last election. Throughout the focus groups, students clearly preferred non-political activities.

Christopher discussed that when he was a child, his mom, who was a single mother, relied on social services and other programs to survive. He discussed how he has volunteered as an adult to give back to his community because he knew it made a difference in his life as a young child. Christopher cited several other organizations for whom he has volunteered and other ways he has been civically engaged during his life. He was an active member of the Masons, whose membership was dependent on his occupation as a tradesman. Christopher became a member of the Masons because of his vocation as an air-conditioning repairman. His work with the Masons includes helping children with disabilities, raising money by hosting running races, staffing local community theaters, and picking up trash on the side of the road, all activities he felt were important to the community and forms of civic engagement (Christopher, focus group, November 3, 2011).

In addition to volunteering, Mike and Katie indicated a preference for giving money to organizations that supported causes and efforts they believed were important. Katie, a student, who also volunteered at a local soup kitchen, followed the work of Amnesty International and regularly gave money to the organization. Katie supported Amnesty International because the organization provided with her information on issues that she felt were important. Also, Amnesty International lobbied for efforts she believed were important (Katie, focus group, November 3, 2011). Mike gave to [www.voter.org](http://www.voter.org) because the organization was dedicated to providing voters with unbiased information pertaining to issues and candidates across all levels of government. Mike believed information, specifically unbiased information, is very important for people to become civically engaged (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).



Adam, a recent high school graduate, described the complex system of support and incentives he received to volunteer while in high school. Adam stated, “I did volunteering for the Bright Futures Program; it was a requirement. A lot of my volunteering hours [were] spent towards that... A lot of it stemmed from my water polo team because my coach really pushed [me] to help the community; to help out with like the Special Olympics. [I volunteered at the] at the YMCA, road cleanups around the school, and a lot of other good deeds” (Adam, focus group, November 17, 2011).

The following pictures provide several examples of how individuals are civically engaged, which include connecting with school and the government and helping others in the community through volunteering efforts. These drawings include elements from several themes including interpersonal interactions among people and the forms of civic engagement (political and non-political engagement). The first picture depicts a group of volunteers who are serving food to homeless or needy people. This representation is one of seven drawings from the completed drawing activities (Appendix G) where citizens are seen volunteering or serving the needy. The researcher noticed “community” is mentioned in this drawing. Most of the illustrations included several of the five assertions outlined in this chapter. Students held a multifaceted view on civic engagement that is depicted in even the most basic drawing samples collected during this research study.

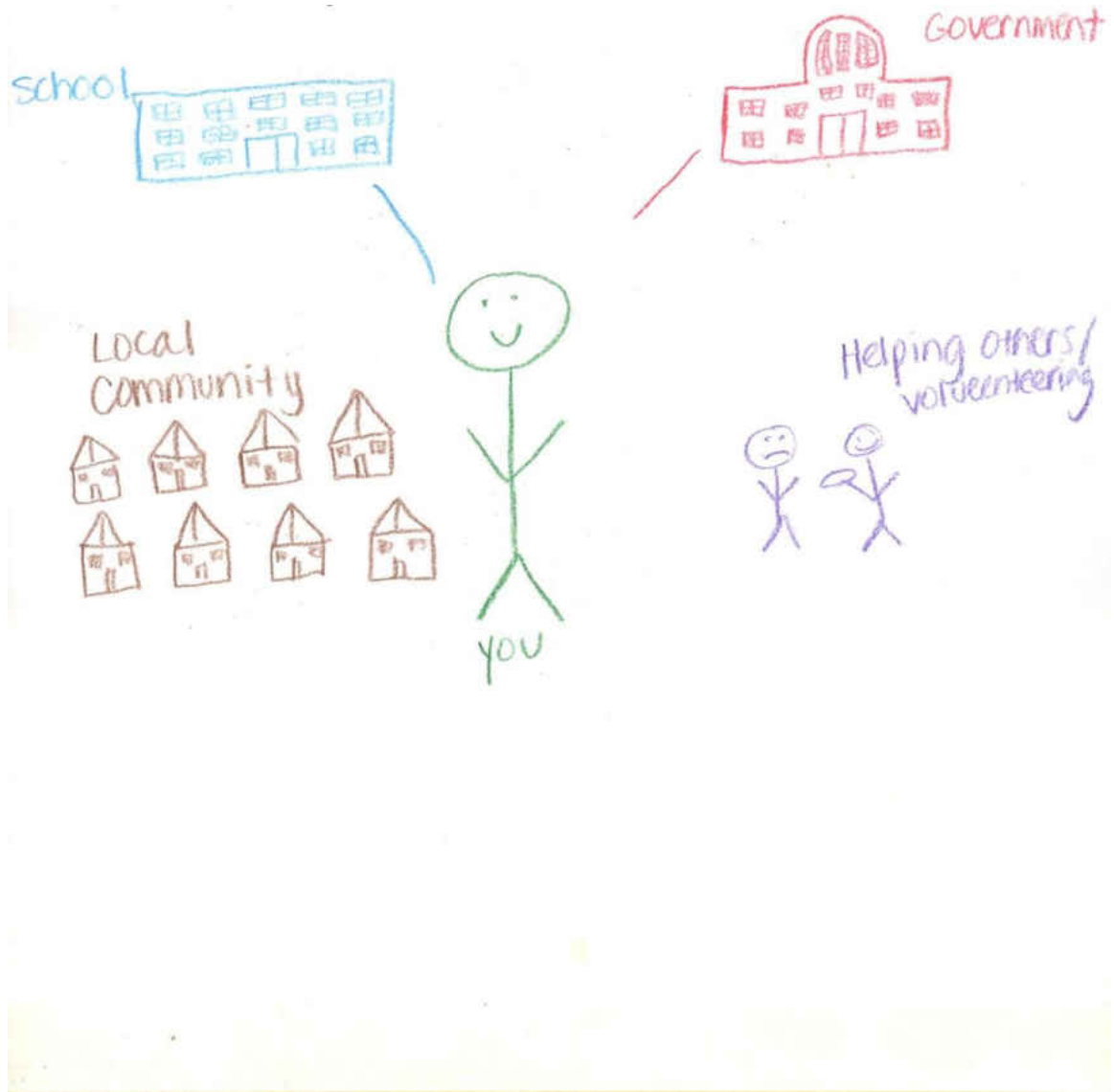


Figure 11: INDIVIDUAL AND CIVICS

Additionally, this illustration places the individual at the center of this multifaceted view of civic engagement. Students seemed to view civic engagement from their perspective. When students discussed civic engagement, they spoke of engagement in terms of how they experience activities in the world around them. The discussion was based on their personal experiences with civics, which is represented in this illustration.

Below are several other student drawings which demonstrate how students define civic engagement in both political and non-political terms. The first drawing depicts how citizens which concerns about national policy can protest to make change in society and government. This provides an example of a political engagement.



Figure 12: OCCUPY WALL STREET

The following picture depicts a non-political engagement. The use of the term community conveys a strong link between community and civic engagement as people are being called to act to help people in society. The word community was frequently used to describe where civic engagement takes place. During focus group conversations, the term community was used to describe a variety of different groups of people which included churches, clubs, organizations and unions.

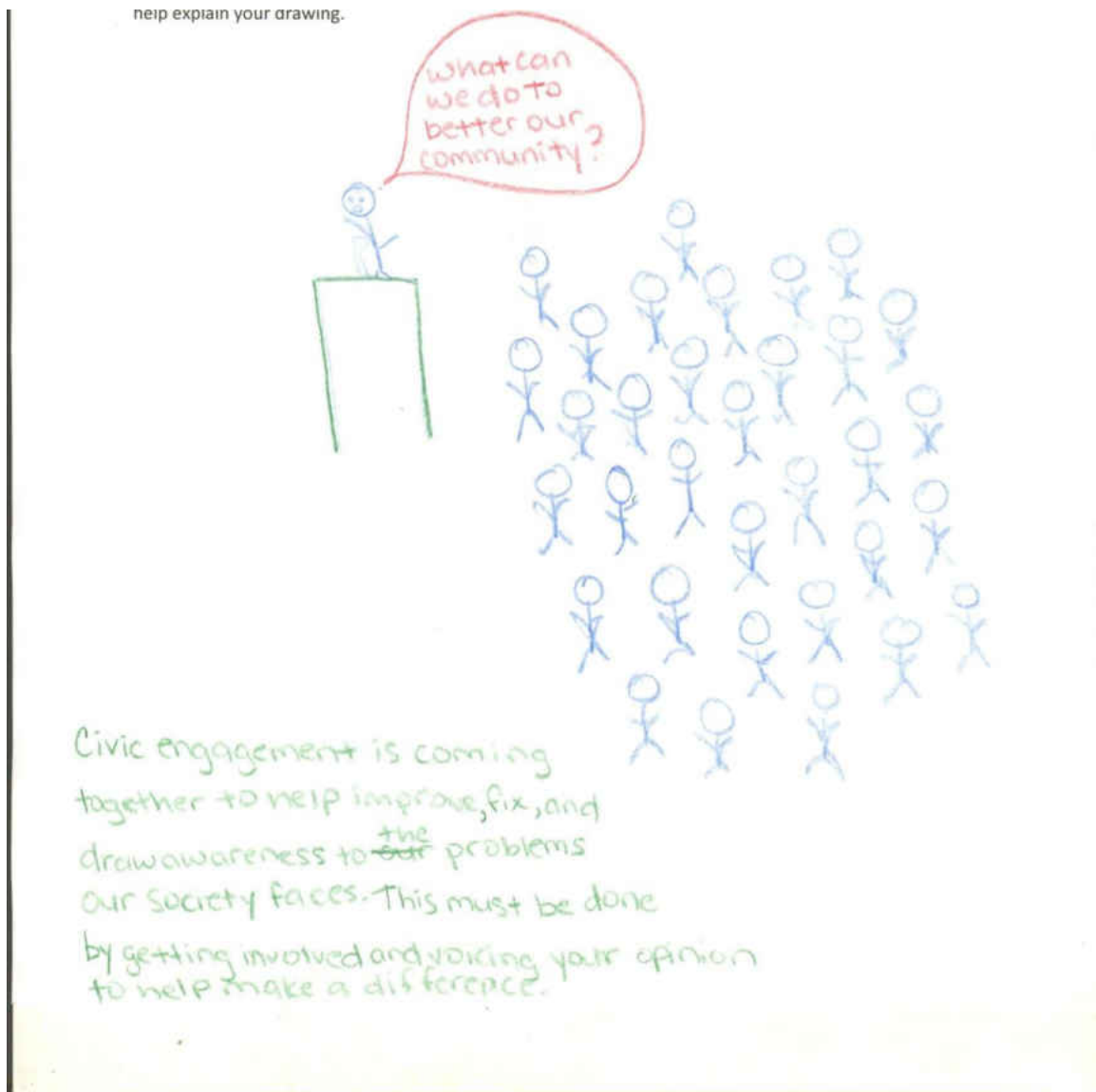


Figure 13: COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT

The next picture depicts how students have a complex and dynamic view of the civic engagement. This picture places people, or groups of people, in the center of civic engagement which is surrounded by school, politics and church. The people located in the middle of the

picture also support assertion two (family impact on civics) and three (interpersonal interactions).

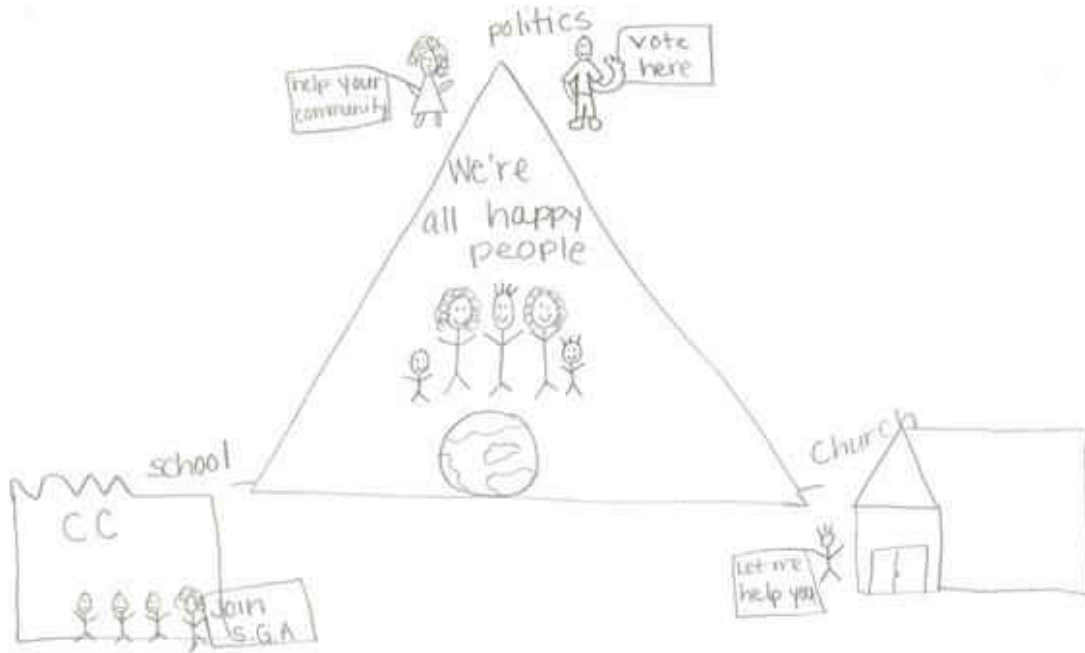


Figure 14: CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

The final picture provided for assertion one depicts a community focus and volunteering to help others. Within the picture the individuals are helping the local community by feeding homeless citizens.



Figure 15: FEEDING THE HOMELESS

## Assertion Two

*Civic engagement is learned from two primary sources: family and school.*

When asked where students learned their sense of civic engagement, students across all focus groups identified two primary sources, school and family. Frequently, students cited how parents influenced their understanding of civic engagement and discussed with their children civic opportunities that shaped their civic preferences. Students also reaffirmed the work of K-12 and post-secondary education had supported the development of civic skills and fostered a sense of citizenship responsibility. Four of five focus groups quickly responded school and family taught them about civic responsibility. One of the five focus groups felt uncertain where they learned their sense of civic engagement; however, they were clear that they had acquired the skills as a result of life experiences and felt a deep connection to how to approach civic engagement, specifically how to approach solving problems within their community. Brian's example of how his mother worked with other mothers in her local community to address the school street-crossing issue demonstrated the impact family, in this case his mother, has on his acquiring civic-engagement skills (Brian, focus group, November 1, 2012).

Jessica, who worked on a city-commissioner campaign, describes how she became involved with the campaign because her family and local community supported this candidate because he represented their interests. Her family influenced her participation in this campaign. Jessica attended city commission meetings to demonstrate her support for the candidate and work events where she promoted the candidate and food was served. Jessica also walked the neighborhoods to canvas for the candidate (Jessica, focus group, November 1, 2012).



Samantha, a first time in college student who works for Wilson Community College as a student tutor and lives at home with her parents, describes how her parents have encouraged her participation in civic activities, which include volunteering, traveling abroad to work on mission trips with her church, running marathons with her parents who are a part of a running club that supports local charities, and spending time at the dinner table discussing politics with her parents. She felt that this time with her parents has helped shape her political values and helped her to stay informed on political issues (Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011).

Specifically, Samantha described how she would talk about politics and other current events on a daily basis with her parents and siblings at the dinner table (Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011). At the dinner table each night Samantha and her parents would talk about their day and discuss news and current event stories they had heard. This time with her parents Samantha felt made an impact on her and her views on politics (Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011). Samantha described these conversations as having a significant impact on her political ideology and her attitude towards civic engagement.

Family and school impact civic engagement as indicated in 32% of the drawings collected. The picture below illustrates a family gathered and talking around the dinner table. This drawing, showing the relationship between family and school to civic-engagement acquisition, is one of ten collected from a research participant. While this drawing is a simple illustration, it shows the relationship between the family and civic engagement. Within the drawing you find a family sitting together at a dinner table discussing their day. This supports

the data collected from the focus groups, specifically Samantha's comments, how family's gathered around the dinner table makes an impact on civic understanding.

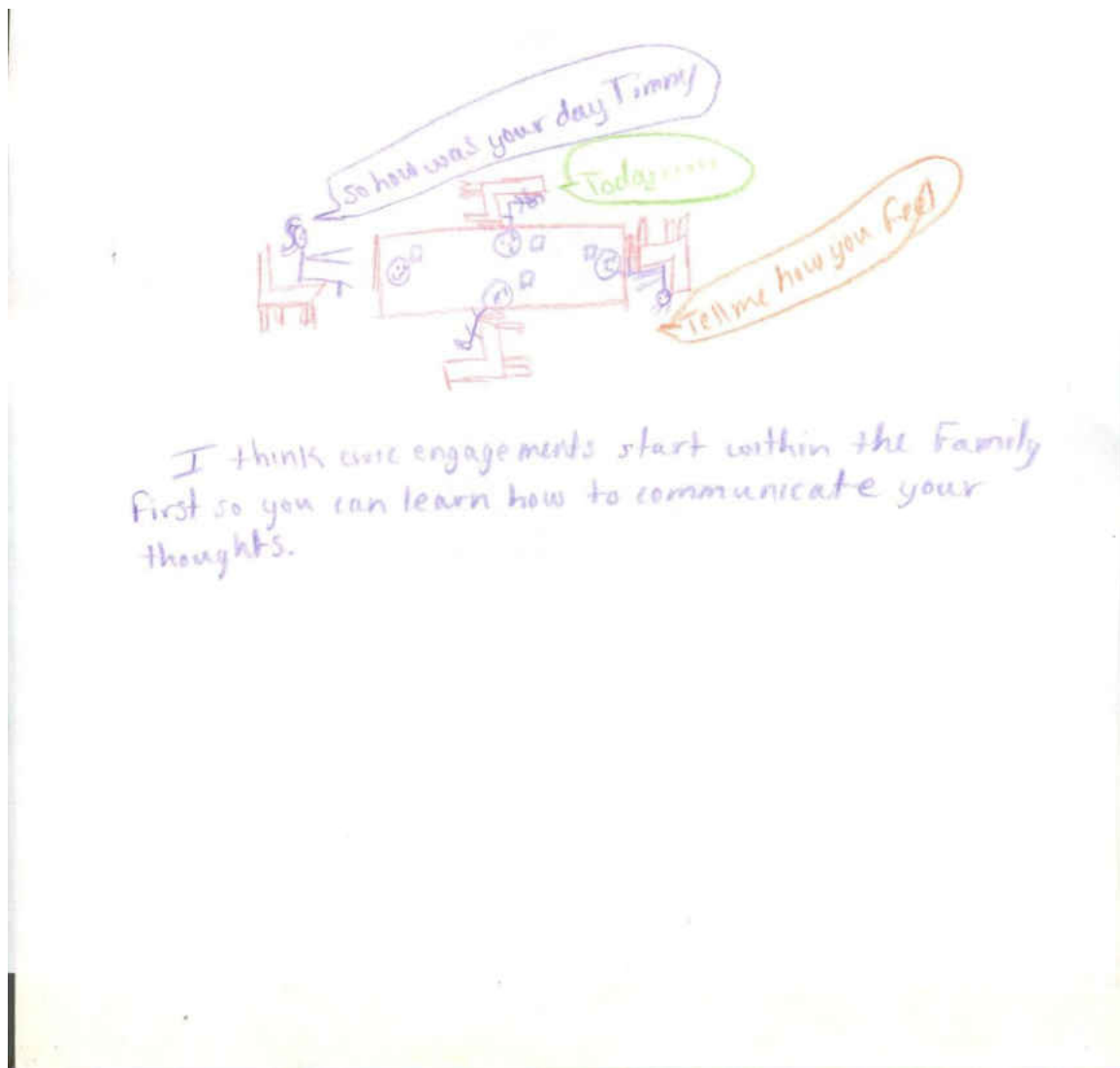


Figure 16: AT THE DINNER TABLE

Students initially did not see a direct connection between the classroom curriculum and civic engagement. However, as the focus-group discussions continued and students more clearly defined civic engagement, they become increasingly aware of how the coursework in high school

and college shaped their understanding of civics. Students reported an increase correlation and connection between civic engagement and the curriculum of the courses, which were dedicated to learning about government, that they had taken or were taking. For example, students easily drew connections from their high school government classes and college political science courses to their civic engagement. Students who had taken U.S. Government (POS 2041) provided several examples of how they had gained awareness of issues, had become better equipped to address problems in society, and had an increased understanding of governmental systems as a result taking the course.

Most of the students who participated in the focus groups had not taken POS 2041 even though most of the students are required to take the course before graduating with their Associate in Arts degree. At Wilson Community College, the Associate in Arts degree requires students to take POS 2041 for graduation. Several Associate in Science Degree programs at Wilson College require POS 2041 for degree completion. Wilson College deems POS 2041 as a social foundation course which meets a state mandate for students to complete a social foundations course as part of their general education program.

In two different focus groups, two students made a connection between the coursework and their level of civic engagement while enrolled in a non-civics-focused class. William reported that his humanities professor had taught the class logic to influence civic activities, such as volunteering (William, focus group, November 17, 2011). Dr. Smith had used logic to encourage student civic-engagement as part of the humanities curriculum, demonstrating the possibility of across discipline opportunities to encourage civic engagement.

During the November 9, 2011, focus group, Mikala and Mike discussed how Professor Hooks introduced readings that had a civics focus. While reading a slave narrative as part of their assignment for their English course, Mike and Mikala connected the readings selected by Professor Hooks to topics discussed in the focus group. Mikala commented, “This brings us back to the day” and caused the focus group to reflect on how civic engagement was experienced through history (Mikala, focus group, November 9, 2011). Mikalla felt the story of the slave narrative provided insight to how civics can act within their community to make a difference; a form of civic engagement. Mikalla elaborated by saying that examples of civic engagement can be found in course work non civics related (Mikalla, focus group, November 9, 2011).

The picture below supports the comments made by Mikalla that civic engagement learn happens in the classroom or influenced by adults. The picture demonstrates not only the connection between schools and civic engagement, but also implies a nurturing relationship between an adult or parent and student. Additionally this picture provides a complex and dynamic illustration of civic engagement. The student provided a colorful drawing of civic engagement that demonstrates a multifaceted view of community, which includes schools, churches, libraries, theaters, parks, and what appears to be a family system (parent and child). This illustration supports the claims made by students that community is an important part of civic engagement. This picture demonstrates an observation made from the focus groups that students had what seemed to be an endless supply of examples of communities that provide civic activities for citizens.



Figure 17: COMMUNITY AND SCHOOLS

In a later focus group, Sarah discussed how her participation in civics has changed from high school to college as she has become less involved in activities such as volunteering. While in high school, Sarah was frequently encouraged by her high school teachers to volunteer in the local community. While her participation has decreased since enrolling in college, she remarks

that she is more aware of the effects of volunteering within society. Sarah commented that “it [volunteering] definitely decreased since I’ve been in college, but I think the meaning has increased. I noticed where the effects are going. Like the homeless at Lake Eola... and the soup kitchens. I can see now where this is going. Whereas in high school I would just see them as being homeless. Now I notice that it is a family of four that just got foreclosed on. I see a lot further now (Sarah, focus group, November 17, 2011).

*The Civic Mission of Schools* (2003) report reaffirms civic education as a primary focus for K-12 educators and calls on our public school system to be the uniform social institution to provide civic education to the masses. While the report cites evidence that the our public schools are failing to provide students the civic education necessary to support a democratic form of government, students in this research study acknowledged that they have learned about their civic engagement from their public school experience. As indicated in both the focus group data and the drawing activity, students are learning a scene of civic engagement from their school experiences. This finding supports the assertion of CIRCLE and the Carnegie Foundation that our schools are the best equipped to provide civic education.

Within other pictures, schools were frequently drawn by student participants to represent the impact schools have on civic engagement. Student participants common illustrated that the school had a significant impact on their understanding of civics and influenced how they interacted in their community. Drawings of school houses and the mention of schools further supports the focus group conversations that schools influence civic engagement. In addition to family and schools as being the primary sources of learning civic engagement, in both the

drawings and the focus group conversations, interpersonal interactions within the family and school setting was important.

### Assertion Three

*Interpersonal interaction between people and groups is the foundation for civic engagement that is commonly centered on community based issues.*

Interpersonal interactions between people and groups provided the foundation for all civic activities. Frequently, these activities stemmed from an issues-based approach to improving one's local community. These interactions were commonly established around an issue that likeminded people attempt to solve to improve society. Additionally, community played a vital role in civic activities. Students reported a community emphasis to all civic-engagement activities. Community was defined as groups of people who have common interests and who frequently work toward addressing issues within their community. Through these communities, people engage in civic work that provides a focus or structure for their effort.

Students reported how issues of concern within a community can provide people with a common interest. Examples of issues included building sidewalks in neighborhoods, developing neighborhood-watch programs, and participating in political causes and movements such as demonstrations and political campaigns. Four of the six focus groups discussed how neighborhoods have worked toward addressing issues related to criminal activity. Students discussed both formal (neighborhood-watch programs) and informal (paying attention to strange vehicles and loud parties in the neighborhood) methods of crime prevention. These community-based issues were commonly cited as the reason for people to interact to improve their local area.

All five focus groups discussed how civic engagement involved interactions among individuals who come together to address issues or concerns in society. For example, in three of the five focus groups, students discussed their participation in the Occupy Smallville movement.



The students who had been involved explained clearly the stance of this movement based on issues and how they had participated (interacted) with others in the community. The students felt their participation in the occupy movement was an example of civic engagement as they worked with likeminded people to identify an issue and work to communicate their opinion about the distribution of wealth and the corruption of Wall Street.

The following picture depicts a group of people demonstrating about a cause e.g. gay rights, woman rights, and animal treatment. The student's use of different colors for the people drawn may indicate an interest to show that people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds come together for causes. This idea of diversity within civic engagement was only represented in this drawing with little mention during the focus groups.

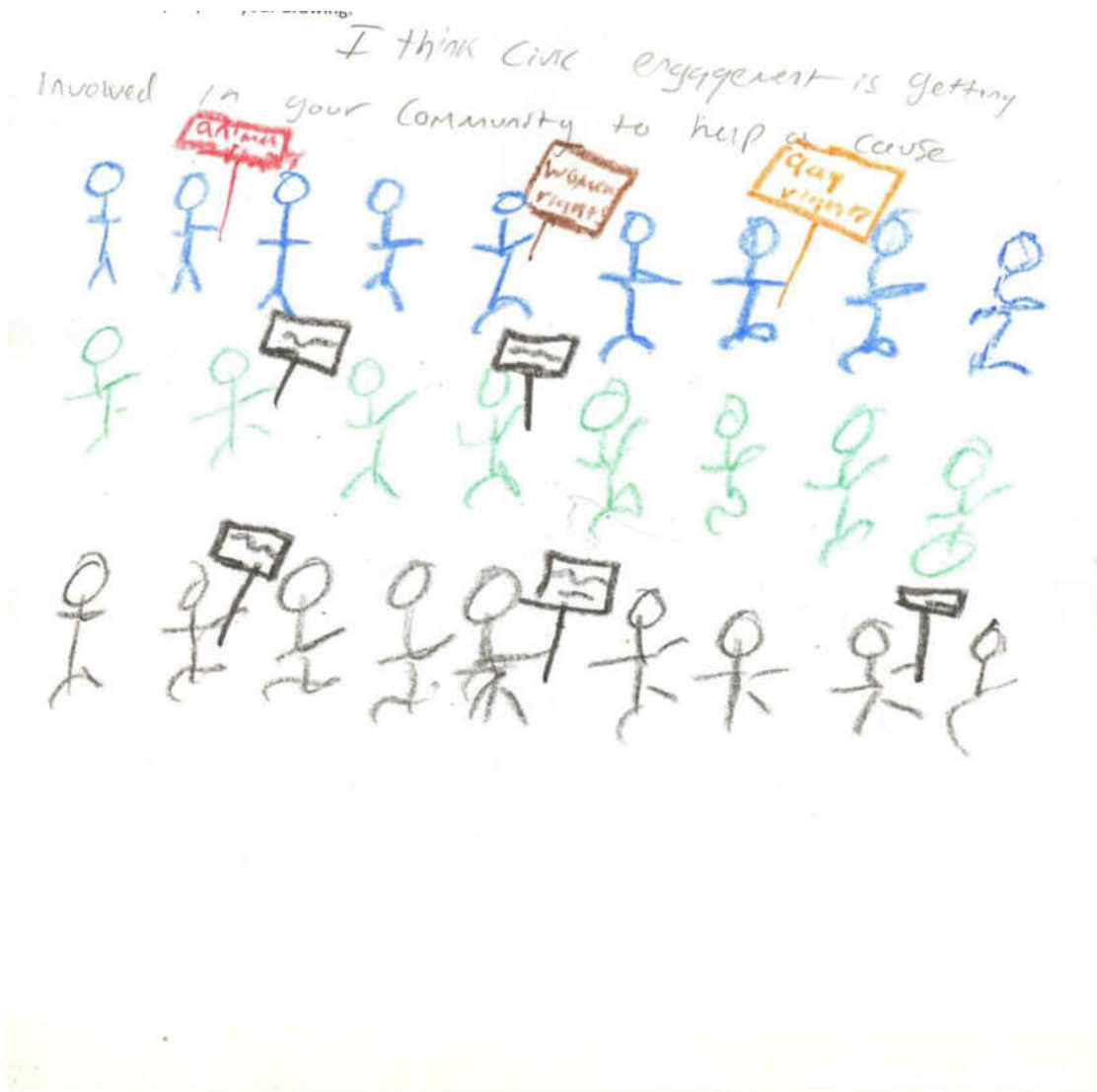


Figure 18: RALLY

Students indicated on the questionnaire the importance of citizens in becoming informed on issues and current events. Students indicated a shift in how students access information and described a wide variety of what sources they use. For college-based engagement, students indicated a preference for hearing about engagement activities through email, but students relied on a variety of different new and media sources. Most indicated an emphasis on using electronic

media, e.g., Internet and with some mention of television and radio, with only two students mentioning print media. One student distinguished a difference in generations and her preference for media. She indicated her parents' preference of reading the newspaper instead of adopting the media sources she was using.

Adam discussed how his brother worked with others to voice his opinion through protests that involved groups of people organized for their cause. Adam stated, "My brother is a pilot and when they were out of a job that he was one of them that went and protested" (Adam, focus group, November 17, 2011). During a different focus group, Katie discussed how she participated in Occupy Smallville events with her friends. Both Katie and Adam's examples demonstrate how interpersonal interactions among people, often times because of an issue of common concern for citizens, provide reasons for citizens to become civically engaged. In both examples, Katie and Adam described issues that citizens protested.

The following drawing depicts how an individual citizen with an idea or concern can communicate and educate others to improve society. The illustration shows how one person can make a difference in society through interpersonal interactions with others and groups. The interpersonal theme was consistently found within the drawings from all five focus groups. Of the 31 completed drawing activities, all but four of the returned drawings (84%) demonstrated interpersonal interactions (defined as two or more people involved in an activity). Interpersonal interaction was one of the most consistent themes found within the drawings across the seven assertions.

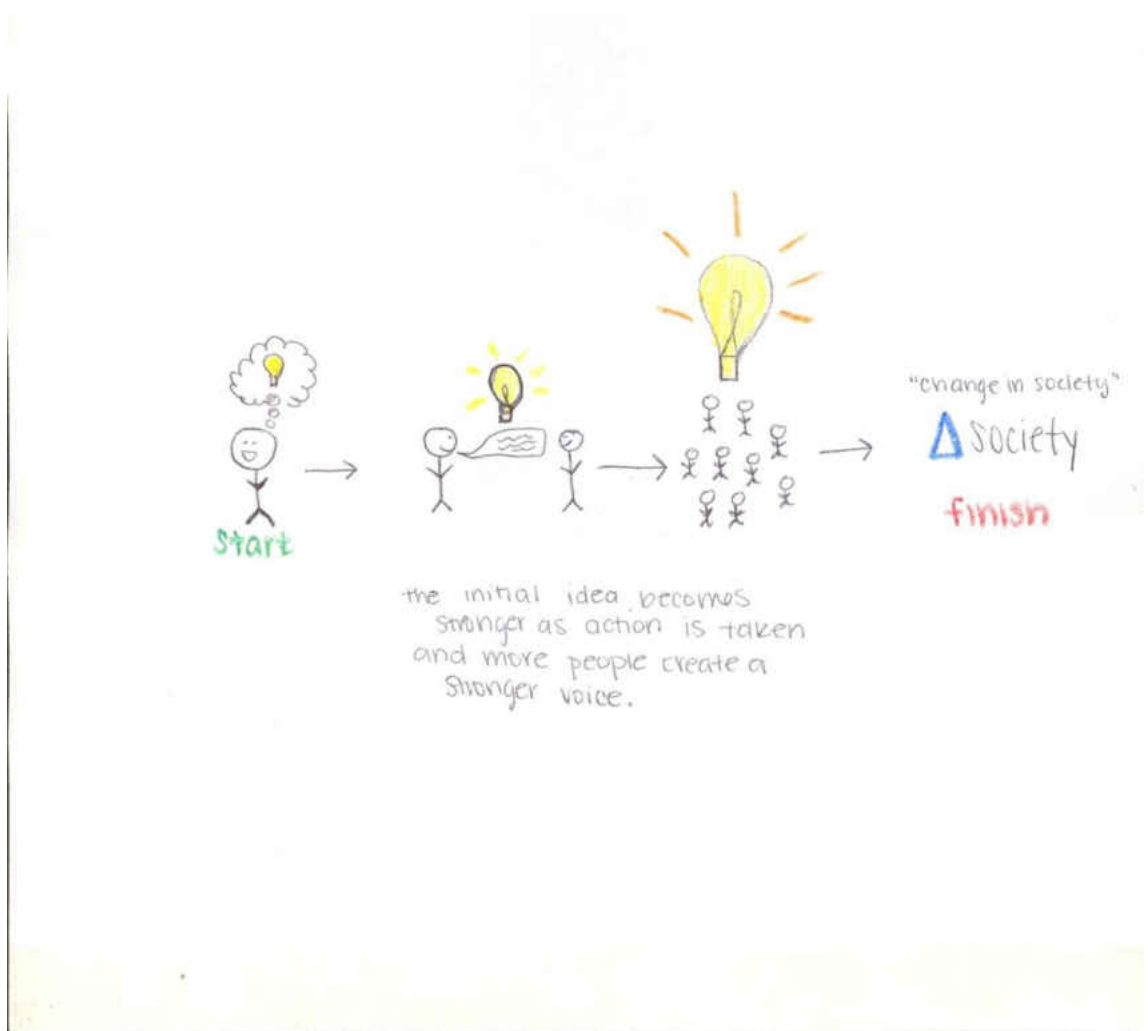


Figure 19: STARTS WITH AN IDEA

The impact community has on civic engagement was a major theme throughout all data sources: questionnaires, focus groups, and drawings. While students provided a wide spectrum of examples of communities, all agreed that the community and overall the interactions of people within society were the most significant factors that influence civic engagement. Mike described how he lives in a neighborhood where “our house is like 10 feet apart yet nobody talks to anybody” unless there is a commonality among the citizens such as ethnicity or special interests

like watching football, etc. Mike suggested that “there has to be some sort of common ground there or they don’t speak to each other” (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).

This phenomenon added complexity to the definition to communities; while students could provide examples of communities, defining community in absolute terms was difficult. In general, a community was a group of people who have common interests and could be found in people’s geographical residence, their hobbies and interests, their spiritual beliefs, social class, and political beliefs. By the end of the five focus groups, the comprehensive list of communities was extensive, and the definition was unique to the individual group. Across all groups, the students agreed what made a community were people connected by interests and served as the foundation of civic engagement.

Community is an important part to civic engagement. Students defined community in very broad terms that included church, neighborhoods, and clubs where a group of people who have a common interest can gather and frequently work toward improving their community. Renee, a student, stated that “doing things in the community like say you need speed bumps or [a] streetlight you can get together with your neighbors and people in the community” to address these concerns (Renee, focus group, November 22, 2011). Students across all five focus groups provided multiple examples of how citizens can identify issues at the local level and work toward finding solutions. During the same focus group, Gina added town meetings and watching news as sources of information to support this type of citizen involvement (Gina, focus group, November 22, 2011).

Jessica described this activity as “everybody coming together for the same cause. So, if like the neighborhood looks messed up and needs something to be done they need to vote on it so it can improve the community rather than just wait on somebody else to do it.” In a later focus group, Samantha described this as the “mini law, rather than having law enforcement, you have the people of the community looking out for other people in the community. And just the law enforcement because sometimes people just don’t feel like the law enforcement does that much, and when they can solve problems themselves” (Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011). Christopher discussed a program, “all pedestrians on watch,” which informs the people within the community on recent criminal activities and hosts events in an attempt to decrease crime in the community (Christopher, focus group, November 3, 2011).

An issues based approach to teaching civic education is a commonly accepted approach to best practices in teaching civics. Shirley H. Engle and Anna S. Ochoa (1998) promote a problem solving approach to teaching civic education. Engle and Ochoa assert that teachers must teach students a basic knowledge of government, foster democratic values, and model democratic behaviors within the social studies curriculum. Engle and Ochoa suggest a problems based approach to civic education, one which is promoted by other organizations such as the Center of Civic Education’s Project Citizen curriculum series. Through a problems-based approach, students would identify a problem within their local community, research the problem, its effects and determine possible solutions. Through this process, students learn the skills necessary to become active and engaged citizens. A problems-based approach aligns well with the research findings of this research study. Students readily provided examples of community

based problems they, their parents or others around them (including organizations) had addressed in an attempt to improve society. The examples of community based problems which students cited in their focus group conversations and drawing activity supported Engle and Ochoa's claims that a problem solving approach to civics is effective in preparing students for civic engagement. Students easily connected their work to identify these problems and work towards solutions as having a meaningful and real impact on the community.

#### Assertion Four

*Career and occupational interests and experiences influence a student's involvement in civic activities.*

Students reported how their career and occupational interests can influence the type of civic activities in which they participate. Students sought volunteer opportunities that provided them with experience in their chosen career field while others become involved in their professional organizations, associated with their trade or occupation, that value service to local communities. Students felt that volunteering provided an opportunity to gain experience in their future career fields. Samantha, commented how volunteering could "open doors" for her after she graduates (Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011). Samantha realized that after graduating, in order to find a job, she would need some experience in her field. She felt that the time she spending volunteering at a local hospital would help her in finding a job after graduating.

Christopher and Mike, who were veterans of the first and second Gulf Wars, indicated their civic engagement was influenced by their military service. Christopher, an older returning

nontraditional student, discussed how he learned to serve the local community while he was stationed in Kuwait. Mike, also a veteran, was stationed in Afghanistan and described how the children of a local village had very little in way of food and clothing. Mike felt that more could have been done for helping the villagers. While it was common for a soldier to receive gift baskets of cookies and baked goods from home, Mike had hoped more would be done to help people with material things, the necessities they need such as clothing and other basics.

Mike visited the local village and met children with either little or no clothing. The only clothing they did have was passed down by others in the community and family. Mike had hoped that more people back home, who he commented “lived in the country of excess,” would send some clothes and shoes that would make “such a huge difference” to those in the country where they were stationed (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).

Samantha, Katie, Mike, and Christopher mentioned how their career choices were connected to civic engagement. While this theme emerged prominently from the questionnaire data, only four of the 33 students who participated in the focus groups made this connection. In the cases of Mike and Christopher, they both discussed how their past careers and military service had impacted their civic-mindedness. In the case of Katie and Samantha, both had previously volunteered with organizations that provided them experience for their future careers. Katie has volunteered at a soup kitchen and fed the homeless in downtown Smallville, providing her exposure to a population she would be working with in the future in her career as a social worker. Samantha had volunteered at a hospital and had gained experience as she prepared to major in Radiological Sciences. Both reflected on how this service to the community would



benefit not only the community but provide them experience in their future careers. Samantha felt these experiences helped her know whether the medical field was a good career choice for her.

Both Mike and Christopher, who were enlisted in the military and served overseas, made a connection to their work in the military and how it fostered a sense of civic duty and responsibility. Mike was stationed in Afghanistan and discussed how he developed an appreciation for how he could give to help others in poor areas of world, a form of civic engagement. Mike emphasized how his military training and the focus of the military to serve and protect the citizens of Afghanistan through his work had instilled a sense of civic duty.

Christopher recalled being taught to help the citizens of Kuwait while he was serving in the first Gulf War. In addition to this military service, Christopher became involved in his local community as a result of his past career in air-conditioning repair. As a member of a local union organization, Christopher had become involved in the local chapter in civic activities, including volunteering for charities and other projects such as adopt a highway.

During the first focus group on November 1, 2011, Peter loosely drew a connection between his current job as a salesperson at a cell phone store and the interpersonal and communication skills necessary for civic engagement. Peter described how his work as a sales representative required him to develop good communication skills that included verbal communication and active listening, both he felt were skills necessary to citizens. Peter explained that to be good citizens people have to be able to listen to other people to understand their point of view and be able to articulate their ideas to others within their community. The

other two focus groups did not draw a connection between civics and their career or occupational interest or employment experiences.

The drawing activity did not yield any supporting data for this assertion; career and occupational interests and experiences influence a student's involvement in civic activities. Of the 31 drawings submitted by students during the civic-engagement drawing activity, none illustrated career or occupational elements. Despite this occurrence, the research had collected enough data to support this assertion based on the civic engagement questionnaires and focus group conversations.

#### Assertion Five

##### *Students identify as being low civic engagement*

Across all focus groups and based on data collected from questionnaires, students self-identified as being low civically engaged. Students consistently perceived their level of civic engagement as low across all five focus groups and the student civic engagement questionnaire. Students reported several barriers to becoming more civically engaged that included limitations on time, money, resources, information about organizations and civic activities, and support from school officials and teachers. Additionally, students did not feel a sense of urgency in becoming engaged or feel that their efforts would matter.

Of the 33 students who participated in the focus groups, all indicated that they were low to moderately low participators. None of the students felt they were high participators. Katie and Samantha felt that, in relationship to most other students, they could be considered moderately engaged, but both felt they could be more involved. Several students felt that

professors and the college environment could be more supportive of their civic engagement. Mikala was more engaged in high school as a result of her teachers pushing her to be more involved. In college, she had become unengaged; in her words, she had gone “to sleep until I try to get another push and then I will get engaged again, but I am kind of asleep” (Mikala, focus group, November 9, 2011).

Mikala described how she was more civically engaged in high school through her coursework. In her high school English class, Mikala was asked to create a brochure for the Beta House (an organization which helps young mothers) to inform people about the services and outreach provided by the organization. This assignment provided the Beta House with a service it otherwise would have had to pay for, costing it valuable resources. Mikala felt that this assignment not only benefited the community but that she also learned something from her work on the brochure (Mikala, focus group, November 9, 2011).

Students felt that clubs and organizations on campus provide civic-engagement activities. Four students indicated involvement in a club or organization on campus. Among these four students who were involved in clubs and organizations at Wilson College, Katie and Jessica stated that they were members of a psychology club, another student was a member of a Caribbean club, and Samantha was a member of a future educators club. All four were involved in their respected club or organization for different reasons. Katie and Jessica, who were members of the psychology club, joined because they were majoring in psychology and their professor suggested that they become involved to gain opportunities in working within the field. Samantha joined the future educators club because she “liked what they do, working with

children” and added, “I am not an education major” (Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011).

While discussing clubs and organizations, several students expressed the barrier to joining, including time constraints due to other commitments, e.g., school work, employment, and family responsibilities. In separate focus groups, Katie and Mike discussed how the clubs and organizations frequently lacked meaning. Students expressed a desire to participate in clubs that were focused on service to the community instead of those that served as a social outlet for students. Students were not interested in a club that focused only on parties and other social functions.

Mike, Jessica, and Mikala expressed interest in and intent on joining a club or organization and discussed several of the attempts by the school to engage students that were unsuccessful. Katie, Mike, Samantha, and Mikala cited how Matador Day, an event meant to encourage student involvement in campus groups, and the activities surrounding the event were unorganized and left them feeling that the intent of the day was lost within the food and music. Katie commented on this “being the Wilson way” and added that there would be “food and music” so students should just attend to get the free food (Katie, focus group, November 3, 2011). Katie and Mike both felt that the school did not explain the point of the events nor were students told about the event until the day of the event. Katie suggested that clearer communication to inform students about opportunities for participation in civic events would encourage their engagement.

Katie and Samantha discussed how they perceived that the local university provided a better environment for students to learn about and join clubs and organizations (Katie and Samantha, focus group, November 3, 2011). Katie suggested that Wilson Community College should adopt a similar approach by hosting a clubs and organizations day where the groups can solicit students to get involved. All students who participated in the November 3, 2011, focus group were unimpressed by the Wilson Community College approach because most students were left unengaged and missed the purpose of the event, which was to encourage student involvement in groups. Instead, the students joked that the students attending the event were only there for the free pizza and music. Mikala and Brian from the November 1 and November 9, 2011, focus groups attended Matador Day and did not learn anything new about the groups.

Throughout the conversation, students provided great detail to the barriers that prevented them from being civically engaged. The barriers include lack of time due to work and family obligations and lack of information and communication regarding clubs and organizations. Students reported a high-school environment that provided them plentiful encouragement to volunteer and become engaged in the community. Mikala felt that she was more involved in high school because her high school teachers were always “pushing” them to be involved in school activities. Mikala stated that she was very involved in high school; she was a cheerleader and involved in student government, but she has not become involved in college. Mike agreed he was more involved in high school; in his case, he was more involved with his church and other community-engagement activities not related to the school, but he was reluctant to become more involved if someone was too pushy.

Mike explained that he was skeptical of a person's motives for pushing students to be involved and admitted he was less likely to be involved if he was pushed too hard. He felt researching an organization was important before he would volunteer or participate in its activities. Mike explained why he was disappointed by the Red Cross because the organization sold the donated blood to the hospitals. As a veteran who had frequently donated blood to help other soldiers on the front line, he had returned home and intended on donating blood but preferred organizations that were not selling the blood. He had hoped to find an organization that donated the blood freely to those in need. Mike was discouraged to find out that some organizations sold blood to hospitals to support their work and pay their employees. This type of information made Mike skeptical of becoming involved in other activities and led him to always research an organization before he volunteers or gives money. Because Mike would extensively research these organizations, this meant he needed more time to become civically involved, and currently, he did not have the time, resulting in a lower level of participation (Mike, focus group, November 9, 2011).

During the first focus group, when asked for more details about the differences between her high school and college experience, Jessica described how her high school government teacher encouraged students to register to vote, provided extra credit for those who did, and incorporated current events and issues into the classroom discussion as they learned about government. Jessica felt this was effective in teaching them to become more civically minded. When asked if she had a similar experience in college, she replied that she had not been engaged

by her college professors in this type of conversation; however, she had not taken POS 2041 yet (Jessica, focus group, November 1, 2011).

During the November 1, 2011, focus group, Peter reported that government policies were discussed in relationship to the economy and unemployment while in his business management course. Peter, a business management major, made a connection between the curriculum in his business class to civics related topics and civic engagement. He felt that the coursework from his class educated him on government economic policy and lead him to becoming a better informed citizen.

Again, none of the drawing activity data provided support for this assertion; students identified as low civic participators. None of the drawings collected from students in the drawing activity depicted a low level of civic engagement because of the nature of the prompt. The drawing activity asked student to draw what civic engagement meant to them, which led to students drawing people engaged in activities and not engaged in being low participators. Despite the lack of drawings to support the assertion that students perceive themselves as low participators, students overwhelmingly identified as low participators through the other two data sources: civic engagement questionnaire and focus group conversations. Additionally, the idea of low civic engagement is difficult to depict in an illustration. Perhaps drawing a low civically engaged individual in a drawing would have been challenging which prevented research participants from drawing this phenomenon.

In summary, the student civic engagement drawing activity provided a rich data source. The chart below provides a summary of all illustrations, including those discussed individually

within the assertions. Outlined in this chart are the percentages of occurrences of all major themes discovered in the Student Civic Engagement questionnaire. A total of 31 drawings were collected from 33 focus group participants.

Table 8. Student Civic Engagement Drawing Activity Summary

Student Civic Engagement Drawing Activity Summary	
Theme	Percentage of occurrences from drawing activity (n=31)
Defined Political and/or Non-Political Engagement	77%
Family and School	32%
Volunteering	32%
Interpersonal Interaction	87%
Community	45%
Career and Occupation	0%
Low Engagement	0%



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Introduction

As a result of this research study, the following five assertions emerged from the three data sources: student civic-engagement questionnaires, focus groups, and student civic-engagement drawing activity. The questionnaires and focus groups were coded and analyzed using Glaser and Strauss (1967) qualitative-research design. The drawing activity was analyzed using a modified grounded-theory approach that used a rubric for reviewing and analyzing illustration, following work of Fournier and Wineburg (1997).

### The Five Assertions

1. Students delineated civic engagement into two categories, political and non-political engagement.
2. Civic engagement is learned from the family and at school.
3. Interpersonal interaction between people and groups is the foundation for civic engagement that is commonly centered on issues found within the community.
4. Career and occupational interests and experiences influence a student's involvement in civic activities.
5. Students identify as having low civic engagement. When asked why students reflect on being more civically engaged in high school because of the incentives to volunteer, the students listed several barriers existing with their ability to be more civically engaged.

These five assertions provide a better understanding for community college professors, administrators and policy makers as to the current condition of civic engagement at Wilson Community College. This research study demonstrates how students define civic engagement within two spheres political and non-political which both deserve attention for this generation of college students. Secondly, our approach to teaching civic engagement should be reflective of the what we know about civic engagement. Some influences which should be considered is impact schools and family and career and occupation interests has on engagement as well as teaching civic engagement with a problems-based approach. Finally, students identify as low civically engagement and indicate great potential for future engagement if they are provided support and the right incentives.

### Conclusions

All three data sources (questionnaires, focus groups, and drawings) support the assertion that Wilson Community College students define civic engagement in two categories, political and non-political engagement. While students spent significantly more time describing how they are non-politically engaged and in several cases described their frustration with political engagement, the data showed that students favored non-political engagement because it provided them a clear and tangible benefit to the community.

Volunteering had become the preferred method of students to becoming civically engaged. Students described a system of benefits and incentives that encouraged, and in some cases required, them to volunteer. This phenomenon clearly emerged from the three data sources. Students were detailed in their account of their volunteering experiences, details that

were not present when they discussed their political engagement. Students conveyed a sense of pride in caring for their community as a result of their volunteering that was absent when they discussed political engagement.

All discussions on political engagement seemed forced and rehearsed by the students. The researcher was left with the impression that political engagement was discussed out of necessity. There appeared to be a general false sense of satisfaction on part of the students to their participation in political engagement that discouraged them from becoming more involved. Students discussed how politics were important to governance and indicated a general understanding how their participation in the political process supported the democracy; however, students frequently mentioned their dissatisfaction with elected officials and expressed a disconnect from their efforts and its impact on their community. This data is supported by work of others in the field of civic engagement.

#### Relationship to Previous Research

The research findings of this study support the work of Zukin, Ketter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli-Carpini (2006) in the book *A New Engagement*. Zukin et al. argued that civic engagement with young people has shifted from a political to non-political focus on civic engagement. While citizens from the Baby Boomers and Traditionalist generations participate in higher levels of traditional political activities such as voting, writing to members of congress, and identifying with a particular political party, the youngest United States' generation, named Millennials or DotNets, have redefined civic engagement to activities such as volunteering,

helping the poor, participating in movement and causes, and boycotting products made by companies with unfavorable practices (Zukin, et al.).

The findings of this research study support this shift in civic engagement and are supported in the data collected. Zukin et al. reported that the direct impact students had made through their civic activities provided students with tangible and concrete evidence that their work was improving their community. This phenomenon was reported by students in this research study and encouraged student civic-engagement in activities where their work improved the community. Students at Wilson Community College preferred civic activities where they can help others in their local community over political activities, e.g., voting and writing politicians.

Previous research conducted by the Carnegie Foundation asserts that students are distrustful of politicians and the political process (Colby, 2007). Additionally, students indicated uncertainty as to how they can make a difference in politics. This too was found in the data offered by Wilson Community College students when they reported uncertainty that their voices were heard by politicians. Student felt that, despite their efforts to communicate their opinions through formal political channels, politicians seemed to act on their own political agendas.

The assertion that Wilson Community College students preferred non-political engagement over political engagement was previously discussed in publications by the Carnegie Foundation. The work by Colby and the Carnegie Foundation described an abundance of community-service opportunities offered to high-school-aged students, which was confirmed in this research study. The foundation stated... “it may be that young people’s high levels of involvement in community service, but not politics, is less a story of their natural inclinations

and choices and more a story of structures and opportunity and incentives provided by adults” (Colby, 2007, p. 2). This provides an opportunity for community college and university faculty, administrators, and state policy-makers to encourage and support civic engagement through the community-college curriculum and other incentive programs, e.g., scholarships and degree requirements.

The idea of students becoming civically engaged through volunteering is discussed in research findings by the Carnegie Foundation on civic engagement. The research findings from this study support the assertions made by Gibson and Levine (2003) that young people, if encouraged with the right kinds of incentives, are able to demonstrate greater levels of civic engagement than they currently do. Students who participated in this study have indicated that scholarship funding and graduating from high school were both significant incentives for volunteering. As a result of this incentive-based volunteering, or in some cases required volunteering, students indicated that they had discovered other incentives to volunteering, e.g., feeling good about giving back to their local community and taking care of people in their area. The use of incentives for volunteering provided students with the opportunity to explore how they can make a difference in their local communities, and all who had worked within their communities were left with an interest in to volunteer in the future. Some indicated that they continued to volunteer, and most indicated an interest in future volunteering.

#### Family and Schools Shape Civic Engagement

This research study affirms the assertions made by the Carnegie Foundation that students acquire their sense of civic engagement through their interactions and activities at school and are

heavily influenced by their family. When asked where they learned how to be civically engaged, Wilson Community College students replied that the two primary influences were their parents and school. Examples from the focus group conversations and drawings included students connecting that their civic development was learned from spending time with parents at the dinner table, spending time campaigning for local candidates (time spent with parents), volunteering with parents, and developing a sense of urgency to give back to a community that had helped them in the past, as was the case with Christopher whose mother had relied on social services as a single parent.

This research study provides numerous examples of how the school experience at both the K-12 and post-secondary level had provided students with instruction on civic engagement. Students cited examples from both formal and informal curriculum (extracurricular activities) as making an impact on their understanding of civic engagement. Examples included coursework across the curriculum including courses in Humanities, English, Business Management, and Political Science.

#### Implications for Policy

The Carnegie Foundation's publication *The Civic mission of Schools* outlines the potential for schools to foster civic engagement through their curriculum and extracurricular activities. The Carnegie Foundation outlines how teachers and administrators can support student development in civics by creating an incentive-based system to foster civic engagement. Since 2003, civic educators have noted an increase of these incentives in the K-12 system, which was reported in this study as having a positive impact on student participation in volunteering

and other civic activities. Because students are required to volunteer for service hours to be eligible for certain high school clubs and organizations, for scholarships and, in some cases, for graduation, they are being exposed to more opportunities to explore civic activities. The noted success of these programs at the high-school level would suggest similar potential at the post-secondary level. These research findings suggest that a similar system of incentives aimed at encouraging student civic-engagement could yield similar benefits to students' learning and civic engagement at the college level.

#### Recommendations to Community College Faculty

Wilson Community College students reported ways that faculty across the curriculum discussed civics; however, few attempts were made to require students to volunteer or become involved in service learning projects. Wilson Community College students cited numerous examples of how their high school teachers incorporated service learning into their civics and general education coursework. These students were left unengaged in service learning-projects in their college coursework and extracurricular activities. Astin's (1993) involvement theory argues that students benefit from active engagement in both coursework and the college environment. The community college could make significant impacts on civic engagement if faculty create active learning opportunities through service learning-projects (Astin).

#### Recommendations to College Administrators and Policy-Makers

Students who participated in the research study cited high-school graduation requirements and scholarship requirements as being incentives to becoming civically engaged. Such incentives and encouragement from the college could benefit civic engagement and yield

similar results of those reported in studies on civic engagement in the K-12 system. College administrators should consider requiring students to complete service learning-projects that could be tailored to a specific major as a degree-completion requirement, creating endowed-chair funding dedicated to service learning-projects at the college, establish scholarships for students who volunteer, encourage faculty sabbatical projects on service learning, and ensure funding for strategic budget initiatives that support student service projects. When possible, students should be encouraged and supported to gain career or occupational experience through volunteering and internship experiences.

#### Suggestions for Future Studies

This research study has established a basis for information on how students at Wilson Community College define civic engagement, how their level of civic engagement affects them, and how the college curriculum and extracurricular impacts civic engagement. The researcher is left with additional potential research studies to advance the understanding of civic education at the community college. A significant finding established by this research study suggests that students do not end their civic learning when they graduate from high school. Civic learning continues into post-secondary education, and community colleges are posed for making a meaningful impact on civics that leads to potential areas of research outlined below.

This research study establishes a connection between student civic-engagement and their future careers and occupations. However, the extent of this connection is not clear. This researcher recommends an in-depth study on how student volunteering can support career and occupational development and job-placement programs. Students indicated that their major and



future career interests helped shape the type of volunteering and clubs and organizations that they participate in. A research study that focuses on the impact that career interests have on volunteering could result in greater understanding of how to connect students to their local communities where those students can gain field experience.

Students indicated successful attempts made by faculty to teach civics with an interdisciplinary approach with other subjects such as English, Humanities, and Business Management. Linking non-civic courses, e.g., English, Mathematics, Economics, and Humanities, to civic courses, e.g., Political Science and American Government, could provide researchers with a better understanding of how interdisciplinary studies can enhance student learning of both courses' content.

While Wilson Community College students provided data on the short-term impact their coursework made on their current and past civic-engagement levels, a long-term study would uncover the long-term impact service learning, civics, and other course activities have on civic mindedness. A longitudinal study on volunteering activities and service learning-projects that tracks and compares populations of students from K-12 through post-secondary education and through their adulthood would provide data on the long-term effect of civic education.

## **APPENDIX A: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**



## **APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP FRAMEWORK**

## **Focus-Group Framework**

Described below are the themes that emerged from the data recorded on the “Student Civic Engagement” questionnaire, which was analyzed using Glaser and Strauss’s Grounded Theory approach to qualitative research.

### **Significant Themes**

**Low Participators**—The majority of students who completed a questionnaire felt they are low participators in civic-engagement activities.

Student cited the following reasons or barriers for their low civic engagement.

- A. Competing work and school commitments created issues.
- B. They were too busy and had no time for civic activities.
- C. Students indicated they had been more involved in high school because of class, scholarship, or graduation requirements or assignments.
- D. After graduating from high school, the students found that their responsibilities increased to include car payments, jobs, family responsibilities, etc.
- E. Students reported a lack of interest in politics and little sense of urgency to act civically.

**College coursework**—Students reported that college coursework increased civic awareness through curriculum, e.g., environmental science courses.

Clubs and organizations—Students defined civic engagement as club and organizational involvement on campus, e.g., SGA, clubs, voter-registration drives, etc.

Addressing issues—Students provided examples that they considered working in groups or acting as individuals on issues of public concern, solving problems, and making a difference as civic engagement.

Volunteering—Student connected how volunteering through charity, church, YMCA, Red Cross, community-center programs provides a civic-engagement opportunity.

Community—Student looked for opportunities to make a difference in the community, help people in need within their local community, develop the community, coming together to solve issues in the community. The word “community” is repeated more frequently than any other word on the questionnaire.

News, Media and Awareness—Students connected the need to learn about topics and issues to become informed citizens. Students reported using internet and news sources to stay informed, a few mention Facebook and Twitter to stay connect to peers and one mentioned using a blog to communicate their opinion. Other students reported watching the news and reading magazines to stay informed.

Specific Movements and Causes—Students reported that they participated in several different movements or causes. Specific movements or protests they had attended, e.g. Occupy Orlando, Voter Registrations campaigns, [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org), etc., were mentioned.

Interactions—Students reported that the way people interact with each other, come together as a society, and come together to help people in groups or individually who are in need was the foundation to all civic activities.

Jobs and Career—Several students made a connection between their job or occupation, their major, current, or future employment, and civic engagement.

Political Engagement—Student specified political activities that involve government such as: voting, registering to vote, campaigning for candidates, being involved in local and regional government, following laws, participating in political parties, and supporting the government.

## **APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**



### **Focus-Group Questions**

1. Please define civic engagement? What are some examples of civic engagement?
  - a. Is civic engagement important? Why?
  - b. Would you identify as a high or low participator in civic activities?
  - c. Do you feel that you are more or less involved in these type of activities than you were in high school?
2. Why are you more or less engaged now than when you were in high school?
3. Are there different types of civic engagement?
4. Has any of your academic coursework influenced to your understanding of, or interest in, civic or political involvement?
  - a) Which course (or courses)?
  - b) How have these courses affected your attitudes, activities, or viewpoints with regard to civic and political involvement?
  - c) Who has completed POS 2041? If students had completed this course.
  - d) What impact did this course have on your civic or political engagement?

5. What types of activities outside of Wilson Community have you been involved with in the past year?
- a. How and why did you get involved in this activity?
  - b) Why is community important to civic engagement?
  - c) Tell me about how volunteering is a form of civic engagement
  - d) How do you stay informed about current issues?

**APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

## Participant Informed Consent Form



### Participant Informed Consent

Title of Research Study: Civic Engagement in College

This consent form requires a signature

Principal Investigators: Landon Shephard M.A.

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William B. Russell

Investigational Site: Valencia College, East Campus  
Orlando FL

Please read this consent form before participating in this research study.

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Introduction: Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics.

To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being asked to participant in a research study which will include between 12-36 people. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently enrolled in a course at Valencia College.

The principal investigator is Landon Shephard who is a Ph.D. Candidate enrolled in the Ph.D. in Social Science Education program in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to determine how college students define civic engagement, determine their level of civic engagement, and how the Valencia College experience impacts their civic engagement. The principal investigator will conduct focus groups with Valencia students and discuss some of their thoughts pertaining to civic engagement. From these interviews the researchers will learn about the level of college student civic engagement.

What you will be asked to do in the study: If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire pertaining to their level of civic engagement, and how they define civic engagement. The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

After the questionnaire has been completed, student participants will take part in a focus group discuss which will include other college students pertaining to civic engagement.

The focus group will take about 45-60 minutes to complete. We will conduct the focus group interviews during regular school hours between 7:00am-9:50pm.

You do not need to answer all the questions on the questionnaire or during the focus group. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The questions are for the purposes of research only and will not be graded.

Location: The interviews will take place during in a classroom provided by Valencia College.

Time required: We expect the questionnaire to take 5-10 minutes to complete and the focus group to take 45-60 minutes.

Audio or video taping: You will be audio taped during the focus group to ensure accurate information is collected. Only the principal investigator will have access to the recordings. The audio recordings will be saved on a password protected computer. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the semester (January 2011). The recordings are necessary for transcription of the focus groups for research. All efforts will be made to protect your anonymity.

Risks: There are no expected risks for taking part in this study. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in this study.

Benefits: There are no expected benefits to you for part in this study.

Compensation or payment: At the conclusion of the focus group you will be given a \$10.00 Target gift card.

Confidentiality: We will limit your personal data collected in this study. Efforts will be made to limit your personal information to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of UCF.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact the Valencia IRB department at <http://valenciacollege.edu/irb/>

Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB).

This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

You may also talk to them for any of the following:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Withdrawing from the study: You may decide to discontinue in the research study at any time without it being held against you. If you do not want to be involved in this research study, do not sign this consent form. If you sign the consent form and later decide you would like to leave the study, please contact the principal investigator. Contact information is provided above.



## **APPENDIX E: EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH LETTER**

## Explanation of Research Letter



### EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Civic Engagement in College  
Principal Investigator: Landon Shephard  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William B. Russell

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- Participants will discuss how the community college experience impacts their level of civic engagement.
- The Principal Investigator will conduct focus groups with students enrolled at Valencia College who have earned more than 45 credit hours.
- During the focus groups the Principal Investigator will ask participants a series of questions related to civic engagement, their level of involvement in civic activities within the college and in the community, and how they define civic engagement.
- The focus group session will be audio recorded. The digital audio files will be kept on a secured computer which is password protected to maintain confidentiality of participants. At the conclusion of the study, the audio files will be deleted.
- Participants will receive a \$10.00 gift card for Target after completing the focus group.
- The student participants will be asked to complete the student civic engagement questionnaire.
- The focus group sessions will last approximately one hour.
- The focus group sessions will be scheduled during September and October at Valencia College East Campus.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints please contact Landon Shephard, Manager, ASC East Campus and

Graduate Student, Social Science Education, College of Education at the University of Central Florida (407-582-2088) or [lshephard@valenciacollege.edu](mailto:lshephard@valenciacollege.edu)

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

## **APPENDIX F: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN COLLEGE ACTIVITY**

### **Civic Engagement in College Activity**

Please use the space provided below to draw a visual illustration which explains and defines what you think civic engagement means. There is no right or wrong answer. This research study hopes to gain a better understanding of how college students define civic engagement. Feel free to create an illustration and use captions to explain what is happening in the drawing. If you prefer to write instead of draw, feel free to write a short paragraph about what you believe civic engagement means. Provided are crayons and colored pencils for drawing. Feel free to include an explanation or captions to help explain your drawing.

## **APPENDIX G: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY CHART**

## Drawing-Activity Summary Chart

Student Civic-Engagement Drawing Activity Summary Chart (n=31, breakdown of all drawings by assertion)								
Drawing code	Assertion by theme							
	Defined Political and Non-political	Family and school	Volunteering	Interpersonal Interaction	Community	Career and Occupation	Low Engagement	Notes
1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	family interaction at dinner table
2	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	school, church, family, and politics
3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	American flag, school, voting
4	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	Issues-based interpersonal interaction with gov't
5	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	interpersonal problem-solving, disengagement
6	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	issues approach, communication, "change society"
7	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	feeding the homeless
8	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	disengagement in politics, feeding hungry
9	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	different people involved for a cause, picketing
0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	people coming together (school, gov't, neighborhood)
1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	school, community, government, and volunteering
2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	community, growth, churches, people and libraries
3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	groups of people coming together
4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	people in a park picking flowers
5	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	people surrounding people in need
6	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	people entering a soup kitchen, volunteering
	Coding	theme absent=0		theme present=1				

**Student Civic-Engagement Drawing Activity Summary Chart (n=31, breakdown of all drawings by assertion)**

rawing code	Assertion by theme								Notes
	Defined Political OR Non-political	Family and school	Volunteering	Interpersonal Interaction	Community	Career and Occupation	Low Engagement		
7	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	people protesting at a political building
8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	politician speaking to people in an auditorium
9	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	politician speaking about community improvement
0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	different people protesting Wall Street
1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	people coming together for common interest
2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	students in a classroom with teacher
3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	politician speaking to audience about voting
4	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	citizen calling a congress person
5	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	politician speaking to an audience
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	citizen watching news
7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	a citizen voting
8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	a person thinking about healthcare reform
9	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	people protesting at school about drugs
0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	a person volunteering or watching the news
1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	a group of people united in the community
	77%	3	3	87	4	0	6		Percent of drawings with theme present
	2%	2%	%	5%	%	%			
	coding	theme absent=0		theme present=1					



## **APPENDIX H: DRAWING ACTIVITY RUBRIC**

## Drawing Activity Rubric

Illustration code: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Themes present in drawing established from questionnaires</b>	<b>Briefly describe which elements are present from each theme</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Illustrated a definition of civic engagement (Political vs. nonpolitical)		
Illustrated two primary sources of civic engagement as family and school		
Illustrated people volunteering		
Illustrated interpersonal interactions between people and groups		

Illustrated community interaction or provide examples of communities		
Illustrated career and occupational interaction within civics		
Illustrated a disengagement in civics		

## **APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Landon Shephard**

Date: **August 18, 2011**

Dear Researcher:

On 8/18/2011, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Civic Engagement at the Community College  
Investigator: Landon Shephard  
IRB Number: SBE-11-07788  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewska, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 08/18/2011 12:26:10 PM EDT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

IRB Coordinator

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