HOW TO QUALIFY YOUR COURSE FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

These materials were developed for the June 2008 workshop for faculty members interested in offering Civic Engagement courses in the new Santa Clara University Core Curriculum. Please contact Chad Raphael (craphael@scu.edu), Chair of the Civic Engagement Faculty Core Committee, with your questions.

CONTENTS

TEN INSIGHTS ABOUT CIVIC EDUCATION FROM *EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY*[1]

1. ***The time is ripe:*** The college years are an especially important time for developing our civic values and habits. Good college courses and extracurricular opportunities can foster civic and political development (3).

2. ***We need to do more to foster political education:*** Despite recent increases in political interest and voting rates among the young, they still participate less in many ways than their elders. Universities can do more to boost participation. Just 1 percent of service learning programs focus on political problems and solutions (5). Service learning and political education can support each other <u>if</u> faculty members take substantive steps to help students reflect on the root causes and policy solutions of the social issues student experience at service placements (39).

3. ***All students – both the disengaged and the engaged – can benefit from civic education:*** Good civic education reinforces and deepens the civic capacities of those who are already engaged and most dramatically increases the interest and knowledge of those who are disengaged (12-13).

4. ***Civic learning contributes to "basic skills" and professional education:*** Civic education contributes to, rather than competing with, the growth of critical thinking, research skills, and communication abilities (283). Students cannot become competent professionals, much less leaders in their fields, without understanding how to influence the field's political context – how law, government and organizational policies shape work, regulation, compensation, and the needs and expectations of clients and publics. And students need and want to think deeply about how their work can best serve the public good (284-285).

5. ***We can have realistic expectations of students' civic engagement:*** Not everyone needs to become an expert on every issue or participate as frequently as possible for democracy to work (7). Our job is to help as many of our students as possible to practice responsible and effective citizenship. "[T]he quality of political engagement is at least as important as the frequency of engagement" (277).

6. ***We don't have to share a single vision of democracy and citizenship:*** If we share some basic assumptions – that a good citizen is knowledgeable, skilled, thoughtful, and able to consider others' views – we can prepare students to participate in a range of ways in democracy: in interest groups, deliberation, social movements, community organizations, electoral politics, government, and so on (6-7).

---

[1] Anne Colby, Elizabeth Beaumont, Thomas Ehrlich, & Josh Corngold. *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

7. ***Successful civic education uses "pedagogies of engagement":*** These include structured discussion and reflection (in an open climate that welcomes diverse viewpoints, including those the professor does not hold); interaction with guest speakers or mentors; internships and community-based placements; and research or action projects (8, 18-19). These methods make knowledge "usable and memorable" for students (14). They connect students "not only with ideas but also with *people* (peers, mentors, clients, etc). Of course, lectures and presentations by professors can also be valuable sources of knowledge (19). Effective civic courses tend to point toward a common final question in each assignment or in the course overall: "What is to be done?" In other words, these courses ask students to derive policy recommendations (for government or organizations) from their research and experience in the course.

8. ***Students need civic knowledge, but also skills and dispositions:*** Political knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient, for participation. Students also need the skills of how to analyze issues, influence politics, communicate, and collaboration to participate responsibly and effectively. Students are more disposed to take part if they feel effective and motivated, if they see civic participation as part of their identity (from "I am someone who votes" to "We are the change we seek") (13-17). Those who develop a politically engaged identity are most likely to keep acquiring civic knowledge throughout their lifetimes, such as keeping informed about current events (279). We must often act on political issues without full knowledge and setting the bar too high for what one must know before acting encourages paralysis (89).

9. ***Prepare for the challenges:*** There are strategies for addressing student's lack of preparation, time constraints, group work, "pedagogies of uncertainty," and the potential for disillusionment (theirs and yours) (290-293). There are also ways of dealing with fears about faculty indoctrinating students: respect basic academic values of diversity of views, respect for evidence, civil discourse, and academic freedom (61-73). This does not involve teachers hiding their views from students – we model responsible citizenship for them and good citizens are not only open-minded but arrive at conclusions and act on them. It does mean offering clear grading criteria based on the merits of students' arguments, evidence, and other achievements, regardless of the viewpoints on the issues that students advocate (see p. 73-76 and chapter 4).

10. ***There are many models for thinking about civic engagement courses:*** See Appendix A, the PEP Document Supplement (on the www.carnegiefoundation.org web site), and the other databases of courses listed on the resources handout.) Many of these courses take place over a semester, a full academic year (or two), or a summer. Consider how we can translate them into "pathways" – the clusters of courses on a common theme that are a hallmark of the new Core. Consider how we can connect and continue the learning process with co-curricular activities and contribute to a campus culture that values political engagement along with other forms of civic connection (296-297).

HOW TO ADAPT OR DEVELOP YOUR SYLLABUS

Read the Overall Learning Objectives for this Area of the Core

1. Students will be able to <u>critically evaluate, and express reasoned opinions about, the role of public organizations</u> (governmental, non governmental, multilateral, or international) in civic life through <u>both oral and written work</u>. (Civic Life, Communication)

2. Students will <u>analyze and evaluate civic issues</u> by engaging in <u>active and collaborative learning</u> with peers and others through <u>one or more of the following</u>:

   a) Working cooperatively with other students in class;

   b) Actual observation and participation in the contemporary ramifications of various types of civic life or civic discourse; or

   c) Working with civic organizations beyond the walls of the University. (Civic Life, Collaboration, and Civic Engagement)

Draft the Learning Outcomes for Your Course

Here are some questions that may help you to identify and prioritize what you want students to learn about civic engagement:

1. What kind of civic engagement have I been involved in that I'm most proud of?
2. What kind of civic engagement do I most admire?
3. What former students am I most proud of and what type of civic engagement are they involved in?
4. What kinds of civic engagement do people in my field need to be involved in to be leaders in the field?

Here's the format for your learning outcomes:

1. "Students will be able to . . ." + action verb (suggesting measurable activity – "identify," "classify," "design," etc.) + noun ("an action research project for a public agency").
2. How your learning outcomes align with the two CE learning objectives (see below)
3. Remember Bloom's Taxonomy (http://www.scu.edu/core2009/Resources.cfm) - try to expose students to multiple levels of learning (as long as they are apt to your course)

Here's a sample set of learning outcomes for Civic Engagement from a course on First Amendment law, including the "assessment plan" in parentheses for each learning outcome:

1. Students will be able to critically evaluate, and express reasoned opinions about, the role of public organizations in civic life through both oral and written work, including:

   - Describing the basic workings of the legal system, such as the roles of trial and appellate courts, federal and state courts, and different kinds of law (assessed through in-class exams);
   - Applying the law to hypothetical situations and constructing legal arguments on behalf of multiple parties (assessed through in-class exams, moot court written brief and oral argument);
   - Applying and critiquing theories of the First Amendment (assessed through in-class exams);
   - Writing opinion articles that defend positions on free speech issues, supported by evidence and ethical principle (assessed through take-home portions of exams).

2. Students will analyze and evaluate civic issues by engaging in active and collaborative learning with peers and others through:

   a) Working cooperatively with other students in class
   - Presenting one side of a debate on an issue of media ethics and law (assessed through hand-out outlining team's arguments);
   - Collaborating in small groups to devise legal arguments in response to hypothetical situations presented in class (assessed through groups' notes).

   b) Actual observation and participation in the contemporary ramifications of various types of civic life or civic discourse
   - Representing a client in a moot court exercise involving First Amendment law (assessed through written brief and video of oral argument).

Add any additional learning outcomes for the course here.

Consider Your Teaching Strategies

The research cited above says that active learning strategies are most successful in civic education. How will you teach your course?

Craft Assignments

What will students do in your course to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes? Are these assignments the best way for them to meet the learning outcomes?

Draft Grading Criteria

As you write grading criteria for the class assignments look back at your learning outcomes. Do the grading criteria for assignments align with your learning outcomes?

Consider Feedback

What kinds of feedback will you give students throughout the course? Feedback might include: student self-assessment, comments and grades, peer editing or critique, feedback from community partners, and so on. As you give feedback, how can you maintain an open classroom climate where students are free to question all views on controversial issues, including the professor's views?

Draft Your Assessment Plan

This may sound more intimidating than it needs to be. Essentially, it means identifying specific assignments that can be assessed to see how well students meet each learning outcome for the course. In the example learning outcomes given above, the assessment plan was simply incorporated in parentheses after each learning outcome. In addition, note how the overall success of the course itself will be evaluated (e.g., mid-quarter or end-of-quarter narrative evaluations, the Student Assessment of Learning Gains instrument, or other approaches).

Consider Integrating the Course in a Pathway

Students will choose pathways through the Core, which are clusters of courses on a common theme. Although it is not required that every Core course fit in a pathway, you will probably attract more students to your class and help them integrate their learning if you qualify your course for a pathway. Have a look at the proposed pathway themes at http://www.scu.edu/core2009/suggested-pathways.cfm . If you see your course as fitting into one of them, contact the Pathway coordinator.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR DRAFT SYLLABUS

Have I provided opportunities for students to build some basic skills and dispositions needed for civic engagement? We were trained to teach students <u>knowledge</u>. Have you included any learning outcomes that involve <u>skills</u>: how to deliberate, how to influence policy, how to run a meeting, how to collaborate, etc? (See chapter 6 of *Educating for Democracy* for teaching strategies). How about outcomes that foster a <u>disposition</u> (attitude or inclination) that you find important for civic engagement, especially increasing students' motivation to participate and their interest in a civic issue? (See chapter 7). Are these among the most important outcomes of all?

Am I demonstrating the relevance of civic engagement to professional leadership? If many students come into the course focused on their professional goals, we need to show them how professional leaders participate in influencing law and policy, how leaders act as custodians of

the field (e.g., by influencing codes of professional ethics with great import for the public), and how leaders draw on their expertise to influence policy to improve the profession and benefit the public.

Are there additional opportunities for active learning I could incorporate that would be more effective than what I do now? If we let go of the idea that it best to use class time to "cover" the material, or illustrate it with examples for the students, we can imagine what are often more effective pedagogies, such as working with students to dramatize, test, research, apply, debate, deliberate, or solve problems posed by the subject matter, rather than covering it.

Am I doing enough to connect the classroom with the world, including experiences and people who can help me to help students learn? Internships and community placements can be good ways to do this. But there are other meaningful and less time-consuming ways to bring students out into the world or to bring the world into the classroom: field trips (including to relevant places on campus or within walking distance of campus), guest speakers, mentors, videos, web sites, webcasts and videoconferences, etc. We should also think about how campus issues and student organizations could be a venue for extending learning outside the classroom.

Am I showing students a range of pathways to participate, including after the course ends? This means showing students how people influence public life in clear, concrete ways that students themselves could emulate. If we show them a range of possibilities we don't have to worry about being accused of indoctrinating them. These might include joining or interning with specific student organizations, professional associations, nonprofit groups, government agencies, or companies. At the end of class, we can inform them of other classes in the Core and major that are especially relevant to this course. How about an email listserv that the professor and the students can use during and after the course to alert each other periodically to news and opportunities for participation relevant to the class?

Have I considered how to integrate opportunities for student research or creative work that dovetails with my research or creative work? If we have our students summarize literature, make contacts, gather data, or generate work that contributes to co-publications or co-creative work with them, then we are teaching and contributing to knowledge at the same time. That's a contribution to student learning and to our fields. That's the ultimate in being teaching scholars.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SYLLABUS

Send your syllabus and a Core Course Syllabus Approval Form (http://www.scu.edu/core2009/) to the Office of Undergraduate Studies. It will be reviewed by the Civic Engagement Faculty Core Committee and the University Assessment Coordinator.

RESOURCES

The Civic Engagement Faculty Core Committee

Contact the Chair, Chad Raphael (craphael@scu.edu) with any questions you may have.

Sample Syllabi

Sample syllabi for Civic Education courses in your discipline may be found at the following sites. These are offered to spark your imagination, not as a set of restrictive blueprints about what you can do. Nor can I guarantee that every one of them, or every assignment in them, will fulfill SCU's learning objectives. They are food for thought, not a prix fixe menu.

SCU Core 2009
http://www.scu.edu/core2009/Resources.cfm
Samples of SCU courses on civic engagement.

Campus Compact
http://www.compact.org/syllabi/syllabi-index.php
Searchable database of community service and civic engagement courses in many disciplines.

National Service Learning Clearinghouse
http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/lesson_plans/index.php?link_set_id=2&category_id=160
Another searchable database.

Bonner Foundation
http://www.bonner.org/resources/guides/civicengagement/syllabi.html and
http://www.bonner.org/resources/guides/curricular/curricular_home.html (under the heading "Additional Campus Best Practices")
A few additional syllabi.

CPN Syllabi
http://www.cpn.org/tools/syllabi/index.html
A handful of other syllabi here.

Community Arts Network
http://www.communityarts.net/canu/syllabi/index.php
Lots of civic arts courses here.

Animating Democracy
http://www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/resources/
More arts-related projects and courses.

Political Education Project
http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/files/elibrary/educating_for_democracy/docs/
Syllabi and other documents for courses.