INCORPORATING EDUCATION FOR CIVIC AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBLITY INTO THE

UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

BY JAN R. LISS AND ARIANE LIAZOS

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In recent years, student interest in civic engagement has resulted in increased opportunities to volunteer on college campuses across the country. Unfortunately, these efforts are often not supported by or coordinated with academic curricula, and, as a result, their benefits can be short-lived. Students who serve hot meals in soup kitchens are not often taking courses that address root causes of hunger or theories and strategies that might help combat it. Despite a growing consensus that civic education needs to be integrated more fully into higher learning, many educators are unsure about how to accomplish this goal. With the Civic Engagement Course (CEC) Program™, Project Pericles helps them to do so.

Project Pericles is a growing national consortium of colleges and universities committed to preparing students for engaged and responsible citizenship. The organization was founded in 1999 by Eugene M. Lang, an educational philanthropist. According to Lang,

> Our country's future as a just, compassionate democracy depends on young people—their understanding and civic responsiveness to society's needs and issues of social change. As a regular part of their educational missions, colleges and universities should provide students with a sense of social and civic responsibility—that as advocates of their thoughtful judgments, they can make a difference.

The national office of Project Pericles works with member colleges and universities to develop civic engagement programs that support, enhance, and extend their existing activities in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community. These programs are designed to enable the faculty to incorporate civic engagement into the curriculum and to empower students to become more thoughtful and effective citizens. To educate students for socially responsible and participatory citizenship, colleges and universities need to expand their curricula, adopt new courses, and revise old ones. One of the key goals of the CEC program is to provide practical advice that will encourage and help faculty to make needed changes.

The Civic Engagement Course (CEC) Program

Project Pericles initiated the second round of the CEC program in 2007 with generous support from the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, the Eugene M. Lang Foundation, and The Teagle Foundation. The project solicited course proposals from member institutions in order to fund the design, testing, and evaluation of liberal arts and science courses that include issues pertaining to civic engagement. The primary goals of the program were:

1) to test the feasibility of incorporating civic education into the curriculum in a variety of disciplines,
2) to establish common learning outcomes among the CECs,
3) to assemble for discussion and evaluation a list of teaching methods used by participating faculty that could be transferred across disciplines and institutions, and
4) to produce a white paper for use by faculty at institutions across the country who are interested in incorporating civic education into their courses—a paper that explains the learning goals that such courses might have and the teaching methods used to achieve them (available at www.projectpericles.org).

The CEC program provided matching grants to faculty members to create or revise their courses in ways that enhance civic education. The selection of courses was a collaborative process that involved faculty and staff on member campuses, the national office of Project Pericles, and external academic experts from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. The selection criteria included pertinence to civic responsibility, academic rigor, creativity, the articulation and measurability of concrete goals, the likelihood of encouraging the ability of students to develop informed opinions, transferability, and the institution's plan for evaluating the courses. The 44 CECs chosen included seminars, lectures, introductory classes, and capstone projects and spanned the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Nearly 1,000 students took these courses between fall 2007 and fall 2008. Funded faculty provided Project Pericles with syllabi, institutional evaluations, and faculty reflections on their teaching experiences. They described the three most important accomplishments and the three least successful elements of their courses and how what they learned could assist others developing and teaching civic engagement courses. Additional student materials provided were varied: pre- and post-course questionnaires, journals, exit interviews, self-evaluations, tests, papers, research projects, and reflective essays. Evaluations by community partners were also submitted.

Lessons Learned

The faculty reported that the CECs were successful on many levels. Their experiences also suggest that there are multiple possible approaches to civic education.

For one, civic education need not be confined to the traditional departments in the social sciences. Humanities and natural science courses successfully incorporated social and political concerns into their courses without sacrificing their academic content. In fact, many faculty noted that civic components increased student engagement with the subject matter of their courses. Additionally, while most courses incorporated service learning and/or community partnerships, roughly one-fourth did not. Service learning is a valuable form of civic education, but it is only one possible strategy.

Further, while many individual faculty offered successful courses on their own, interdisciplinary and/or team-taught courses were often effective in helping students view issues from multiple perspectives and consider ways of applying knowledge and conceptual frameworks in multiple contexts. Faculty who engaged in such collaborations pointed out that doing so deepened both faculty and student interest and engagement.

Despite these diverse approaches, almost all of the CECs shared three learning outcomes:

1) the ability to recognize and view issues of social concern from multiple perspectives and to formulate and express an informed opinion on those issues

When discussing the major accomplishments of their courses, many faculty mentioned students "breaking down assumptions" and becoming "more aware of some of their own biases and prejudices." To achieve this kind of learning, several faculty believed that the creation of an "open atmosphere" in the classroom "where all views could be heard and respected" was crucial.

Some stressed the value of interdisciplinary coursework, noting that integrating the perspectives of multiple disciplines on an issue "helped … students develop new tools … to analyze material from their home discipline." Others emphasized cultural diversity, highlighting "the recognition of different value systems" and the integration of "issues of racial and ethnic diversity" as major achievements. After considering multiple perspectives, faculty often then asked students to "take a stand" or "recommend a policy." In short, integrating perspectives that varied by discipline, class, gender, race, ethnicity, and political persuasion helped students understand and respect multiple points of view on issues of social concern, a crucial ability for citizens in a democratic society.

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2) *the ability to apply academic knowledge to issues of social concern*

Relating academic texts and theories to real-world problems is a key outcome for civic education. Whether by helping students to connect "the act of writing with civic engagement" or by "introduc[ing] the sociological theories applicable to the analysis of social issues and problems in the local community," numerous faculty worked to integrate theory and practice. Many believed that doing so helped students to develop "a conceptual framework" or "intellectual foundation for engagement." As one faculty participant noted, "Recognizing that the concepts they were learning about … have tremendous relevance to contemporary problems in our society" helped students to acquire both the knowledge and skills necessary for active citizenship.

3) *the motivation and capacity to utilize these abilities in new contexts in order to take action in the community*

Faculty celebrated "transforming student idealism into action"; "inspiring students to become active in their communities"; and "inspiring students to think of community partnership, collaboration, and engagement as potential starting places in many diverse aspects of their lives" as major achievements.

Novel Approaches to Research Papers and Projects

As we analyzed the syllabi and statements of the CEC faculty, we assembled a list of teaching strategies that many faculty successfully employed to achieve the three learning outcomes described above. Here we focus on one—*novel approaches to research papers and projects*—that proved to be particularly effective in helping students connect classroom content with problems facing their local communities, inspiring a commitment to civic work and sense of accountability that yielded higher-quality work. (See our white paper at www.projectpericles.org for a full discussion of these strategies.)

Transforming research projects in ways that enable students to connect "theory and practice" can deepen student engagement with materials in the humanities. For example, in an art history course on "Museums and Their Communities" at Ursinus College, Susan Shifrin, an art professor, explained to her students that they would apply what they learned in the course by "envisioning, planning, revising, implementing, and evaluating a museum- and community-based partnership project." For this project, several students developed a public forum about the preservation, presentation, and sustainability of an historic site. Capturing a feeling expressed by many CEC faculty, Shifrin wrote that this kind of project not only achieved "the successful integration of theory and practice" but also fostered a deeper "sense of commitment and engagement on the part of the students" to the course.

Assigning research projects that directly filled a need in the community worked in the natural sciences as well. Physicist Adrian Hightower of Occidental College required students in "Energy Conversions and Resources" to conduct energy audits with partners in the Los Angeles area, including the Audubon Center, for which students assessed the potential of purchasing an electric vehicle and connecting the center to an electrical grid. Hightower's evaluation stressed the "reciprocal benefits" of this community partnership, noting that "the information produced by the physics students has enabled Audubon staff to hold a more informed conversation and more clearly articulate the Center's operational, financial and programmatic goals to their consultants."

Faculty in the social sciences also found that projects that served a real purpose in the community deepened student enthusiasm and learning. At Macalester College, geographers in three courses collaborated to have students write reports on local water conservation and present them at an undergraduate research conference. As David Lanegran, one of the three geographers, explained in his syllabus, "For this class we assume the structure of a consulting firm that has a contract to produce a report for a policy implementing organization."

At the end of the course, students generated an annotated atlas that documented population distribution, economic development, environmental concerns, and public policies pertaining to the Crow River Watershed. The atlas helped residents deal with issues resulting from the transformation of the rural landscape from an area of production to one of leisure and consumption. Geographer Daniel Trudeau found that "the external accountability component of the public scholarship project inspired students to aim very high and do excellent scholarship."
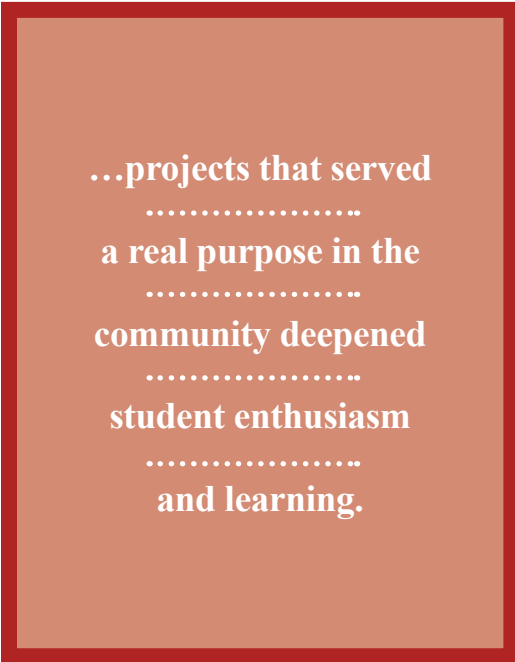
Student evaluations also conveyed a deep appreciation for the opportunity to connect theory to practice. Professor of geography and urban studies Myrna Breitbart at Hampshire College had students produce a variety of resources for the community in her course "The Crafted City: Art, Urban Regeneration, and the New Cultural Economy"—a guide for students interested in working or volunteering in nearby Holyoke, a public presentation on the South Holyoke Community Arts Initiative Evaluation, and a public workshop on "Creating Sustainable Neighborhoods in Holyoke." As one student wrote, "It was refreshing to do research for direct, applied purpose," noting the "higher stakes and added accountability." Another contrasted "this kind of writing" with "academic writing" and concluded that "it was a good learning experience to use my analytic and writing skills for a community-based purpose."

While working with community partners is an effective strategy for transformative research projects, some courses without community partnerships were able to adapt research papers in ways that enabled students to relate course materials to real-world problems and view these problems from a variety of perspectives. Requiring students to take a position on a pressing social issue is one approach.

At Wagner College, for instance, a course called "The Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications of the Genome" modified the traditional research paper by requiring students "to identify issues, take a stand, recommend a policy, and anticipate the desired outcome of their policy." This interdisciplinary class was co-taught by sociologist John P. Esser and biologist Ammini Moorthy, who stated that this assignment "force[d] students to think about social problems stemming from developments in genetic science."

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Another approach to the research paper is to send students to groups directly affected by the subject matter of a course. At Pitzer College, in "Topics in Native American Art History: Native California," students conducted primary research of this kind at one of several local museum collections. As art historian Bill Anthes wrote in his course syllabus, "Students will learn the value of … incorporating Native voices into the study of Native American art and cultural history" in order "to develop an appreciation of the history and continuous importance of indigenous issues and perspectives in the contemporary civic sphere."

Innovative research projects, such as ones that ask students to take a stand or use alternative research methods, stimulate students to think about social problems. They expose students to new perspectives and connect their coursework to the world outside academia. While undertaking these projects, students develop the knowledge, skills, values, and motivation that they need to become engaged citizens.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

While the vast majority of the CEC faculty found their experiences rewarding, many also noted the unique challenges posed by incorporating civic education into academic courses. The successes of the CEC program demonstrate that careful planning can minimize many of these problems. In particular, recognizing and managing expectations—of colleagues, of the faculty themselves, of community partners, and of students—can help.

The expectations of colleagues

Some faculty and administrators fear that incorporating civic education into the curriculum will compromise the objectivity that is crucial to academic scholarship. Others worry that civic education, particularly when it includes service learning or other forms of community partnerships, can detract from the academic content of a course. In this regard, both institutional and CEC support have helped create more welcoming climates for this work.

By working in conjunction with the provosts and program directors to create a competition for grants that were matched by the colleges and universities, the CEC program has provided financial, administrative, and ideological support to faculty interested in incorporating civic education in their courses. The publicity given the CEC program on campus has helped spark discussions about the need for, approaches to, and benefits of civic education. For instance, according to Susan Phillips, former Project Pericles program director at Pitzer College, the CECs took the college "in important, new directions regarding political voice, underrepresented minorities, and pressing social issues."

Yet there are additional strategies that faculty may employ, regardless of the level of institutional support available to them. One is to align civic education with other traditions on campus, thereby widening the scope of potential supporters. Sociologist Berna Turam advises that "it is important to create a course that fits well with the culture of your institution." Her course ("Civil Society and the State") was successful in part because "it drew on the rich activist tradition at Hampshire College and within the surrounding local area."

Another approach that may help alleviate concerns at the departmental level is to offer courses that align with faculty research. Daniel Trudeau at Macalester College suggests that "other junior faculty members integrate civic engagement into the courses only under conditions where it clearly advances their teaching and/or research programs." Noting the enormous amount of time required to develop civic courses that usually is "uncompensated and largely unrecognized," he suggests that "junior faculty should work quite intentionally to align civic engagement work with the types of professional development that are considered significant by the institution."

The expectations of faculty

Several faculty members commented on the increased time commitment necessary for creating and teaching CECs. Particularly when community partners were involved, faculty spent a significant amount of time on bureaucratic and organizational matters. A number of faculty also felt that by attempting to accomplish too much, they were not able to include everything in their courses.

Faculty have provided numerous suggestions for lessening the time commitment when dealing with community partners. Several mentioned the possibility of securing additional assistance to coordinate collaborations. While some suggested hiring a part-time assistant if funding is available, others turned their need into a learning experience for students, allowing upper-class or graduate students with previous volunteer experience to serve as coordinators and/or program supervisors. Acting in these capacities helps students develop real-world leadership and organizational skills.

Alternatively, other faculty have noted that forming consistent, long-term relationships with the same community partners lessens the time required for organizational matters. Rather than allowing students to select placements themselves (which can be extremely time-consuming for all involved), they recommend pairing students with community partners with whom faculty have existing relationships. Team-teaching courses or collaborating with another faculty member can also be time consuming. So faculty have proposed carefully selecting faculty partners, scheduling classes to meet concurrently to make joint meetings possible, and dividing up the work of the course(s) among the instructors.

The expectations of community partners

Many faculty commented on the incompatibility of the semester length with the needs of community partners and/or their own learning goals for their students. For community partners, working with students requires a significant investment in terms of training, supervision, scheduling, and project management.

One solution is to pair service learning with year-long courses or, alternatively, to make use of a "project-based service learning" model in single-semester courses. When community partners and faculty plan projects for students that can be completed in a single semester, everyone feels a sense of accomplishment and closure. Many of the CECs, from "Museums and Their Communities" at Ursinus College to "Energy Conversions and Resources" at Occidental College, employed the project-based model. As Daniel Trudeau of Macalester College observed, "It is important to integrate students so that they can begin and end the project" to give them a sense of "ownership in its development" and culmination.

The expectations of students

Students sometimes felt overwhelmed and unprepared to manage the extra time demands of civic engagement courses, especially if the professor did not make these demands clear at the start of the semester in the syllabus and in class. We urge faculty to convey to students as clearly as possible 1) that the course has a civic component and 2) what that component entails (particularly community-service requirements, community partnerships, and non-traditional research assignments). Several of the CECs

did so explicitly in their syllabi. (See www.projectpericles.org for links to all of the syllabi.)

Some students expressed frustration as a result of their experiences in dealing with community partners. In one class, a professor invited a guest lecturer from the community to the class who unexpectedly made racist remarks. In another, students organized a community meeting, and no one showed up. While challenging, such experiences could serve as excellent learning opportunities for students as they develop the skills and motivation necessary to become thoughtful and engaged citizens. As anthropologist Kim Jones of Elon University noted:

> In the real world, things don't always happen as you might expect, and it is important to process these difficulties collectively as an important part of experiential learning. It is important for students not to get frustrated and disappointed when structural barriers prevent them from being able to do everything they wish they could do for the community. …[W]ith proper guidance these moments of frustration can be invaluable opportunities for the students to come to empathize with the frustration and disappointment of people who are disenfranchised and recognize that making change is not a simple task that nobody has tried to do, but a process that requires a great deal of flexibility, patience, and perseverance.

In the end, while CECs place extra demands on the faculty, careful planning and use of available resources can alleviate those pressures. Ultimately, the faculty overwhelmingly found that the benefits students, professors, institutions, and communities reap from these courses are worth the extra effort they require.

THE BENEFITS OF CIVIC EDUCATION

The CEC program has helped colleges and universities expand course offerings that encourage civic responsibility and has increased the range of courses in which social issues are considered. With the completion of this second phase of the program, the institutions now have a body of more than 100 civic engagement courses in a wide range of fields, with many faculty members already developing new courses.

Although we recognize that faculty at Periclean colleges and universities possess a level of assistance that is often not available at other institutions, we believe that many of the strategies detailed here and in the Project Pericles white paper (www.projectpericles.org) can be employed by faculty at colleges and universities without similar levels of institutional support. The diversity of our membership suggests that the courses Pericleans developed should have wide applicability to any college or university motivated to incorporate civic engagement issues into its curricula. The courses in this study—and the fact that they were developed and taught—should be inspiring to colleges and universities that aim to provide civic education to their students.

The 44 funded courses had a wide impact on their campuses and beyond. Periclean initiatives in the community received coverage in local papers, and several faculty members and students presented their coursework at academic conferences throughout the country. Moreover, team-taught courses, conferences, guest lecturers, and collaborations with community partners all extended the reach of the CECs, helping change climates on campuses favorable to civic education. As Allegheny's Linda C. DeMeritt, dean of the college, noted, "The Project Pericles CEC grant has broader implications than for just one course." It "contribute[s] to a culture at Allegheny of committed, knowledgeable, and engaged citizens."

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The CECs have had a direct impact on their communities as well, providing services and addressing social and political problems. From the annotated atlas created by Macalester College's geography students to a community assets map of Chester, PA, created by Widener University's social work students, the CEC projects provided valuable information on local problems to community partners. Students at Ursinus College preserved and promoted local historic sites, and students at Macalester College and New England College educated their peers and other community members about the recent presidential elections.

Faculty members also commented extensively on the capacity of their courses to achieve valuable learning outcomes: the ability to recognize and view issues of social concern from multiple perspectives, to formulate and express an informed opinion on those issues, and to use academic knowledge to address issues of social concern—as well as the motivation and capacity to use those abilities to take action in the community.

Urban studies professor Jürgen von Mahs of The New School commented that students in his course on urban homelessness "gained tremendous insights into the problem of homelessness," "developed a great appreciation for the efforts of homeless service providers and the multiple challenges they face," "began to rethink their own stereotypes about homeless people," and "indicated that they plan on [or] would like to continue volunteering." Likewise, Myrna Breitbart at Hampshire College thought that the excitement her students felt at "being able to observe firsthand what they were reading about and apply[ing] their knowledge to further a valuable social change agenda" were among the most successful elements of her course.

Comments by students themselves in course evaluations highlight the extent to which CECs can inspire young people. In one example, two students from Elizabeth Weiss Ozorak's "Community Psychology" course at Allegheny College underscored the transformative potential of civic education for undergraduates:

> This course has in ways acted as the compass on my road into the future… [It] has helped me to look through a holistic lens, to see the bigger picture, to see the larger connections, and in the end it has helped me to grow closer to understanding the complexity of my life's work.

> This course has been a great springboard for thinking about what I want to do later in life. It has really inspired me to create a better world.

As these comments demonstrate, civic education has the potential to help students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to take action in their communities as thoughtful, engaged, and socially responsible citizens. **C**