The Pursuit of Civic Engagement: Youth Civic Engagement and the Role of Higher Education

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Civic engagement and higher education

- The Taskforce on Active Citizenship 2007
- Establishment of Campus Engage
- The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030
- Presidents of Irish higher education sign national charter for civic and community engagement.
So what does it mean to be civically engaged in the 21st Century?
Previous research findings:

- Disagreements between academics over what constitutes ‘civic engagement’.

- Two paradigm divide
My research - overview

- **Objective 1:** to survey participant’s, aged 18-25, patterns of civic behaviour, broadening traditional civic indicator measurements to include new indicators that will capture any alternative forms of youth civic engagement.

- **Objective 2:** to explore and gain an understanding of participants’ attitudes towards their social and political engagement or disengagement.
Methodology

A mixed-methods research strategy was employed involving both quantitative and qualitative elements.

Objective 1 – Quantitative Survey

Objective 2 – Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups
Quantitative results - survey themes

The data presented specifically relates to the role of higher education in educating students for civic engagement – covering the following themes:

F1 – Electoral Indicators
F2 – Civic Indicators
F3 – Public Voice Indicators
<table>
<thead>
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<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>18 - 21</td>
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<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 - 25</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>49</td>
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<td>Social Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>Creative Digital Media</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
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<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports Management</td>
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<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Early Childhood Dev</td>
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Electoral indicators

Volunteering for Political Organisation
Campaign Contributions
Deliberate Acts of Non-Voting/Blank Voting
Intent on Voting in May European Elections
Regular Voting (Always) (Incl Non-Registered)
Registered to Vote

Female
Male
Total

Registered to Vote: 65%
Regular Voting (Always) (Incl Non-Registered): 46%
Intent on Voting in May European Elections: 32%
Deliberate Acts of Non-Voting/Blank Voting: 26%
Campaign Contributions: 16%
Volunteering for Political Organisation: 12%
Civic indicators

**Donated blood**
- Female: 9%, 14%, 23%
- Male: 13%, 21%, 24%
- Total: 17%, 25%, 31%

**Fund raising for charity - Health**
- Female: 8%, 13%, 21%
- Male: 14%, 26%, 30%
- Total: 16%, 29%, 35%

**Fund raising for charity - Env**
- Female: 21%
- Male: 30%
- Total: 28%

**Fund-raising walks/swims/rides**
- Female: 18%
- Male: 35%
- Total: 27%

**Formed/joined a group of like...**
- Female: 6%
- Male: 9%
- Total: 8%

**Member of an interest related...**
- Female: 15%
- Male: 15%
- Total: 15%

**Regular volunteering**
- Female: 7%
- Male: 17%
- Total: 14%

**Community problem solving**
- Female: 0%
- Male: 20%
- Total: 10%
Public voice indicators

- **Buycotting**: 70%
  - Female: 6%
  - Male: 26%
  - Total: 44%

- **Boycotting**: 49%
  - Female: 21%
  - Male: 28%
  - Total: 26%

- **Signing Petitions**: 41%
  - Female: 19%
  - Male: 22%
  - Total: 13%

- **Protesting**: 17%
  - Female: 4%
  - Male: 9%
  - Total: 13%

- **Contacting tv/radio stations**: 12%
  - Female: 3%
  - Male: 7%
  - Total: 10%

- **Contacting newspapers**: 17%
  - Female: 5%
  - Male: 12%
  - Total: 17%

- **Contacting a local/national...**: 10%
  - Female: 0%
  - Male: 4%
  - Total: 4%
Preliminary qualitative findings - key themes

- Theme 1: young people outside of the political sphere
- Theme 2: political knowledge and efficacy
- Theme 3: youth political involvement
The main reason each student gave was “politicians not reaching out to young people” and not “pulling them in”.

The students also highlighted that there are a lack of young political representatives and that makes them feel ‘out of place’.
Theme 2: political knowledge and efficacy

- An evident lack of knowledge about citizenship, politics and political representatives.

- All citing difficulties in keeping informed - “When I think of politics, I think that you have to know a lot to be able to be into it, you have to know everything that’s going on and everyone involved in it”.

- Hearing others views on issues that they disagree with makes them ‘switch off’ or ‘tune out’ because it gets very serious and they “don’t want to deal with that, it gets too much”.
“Mix things up a little”

“A bit of change... move with the times”

“Even things out... and upset the rhythm”
Low rates of traditional forms of civic engagement

Broader measurement provides evidence of engagement with alternative forms of civic engagement

However, this does have consequences for young people politically and democracies survival.
Discussion

- It is not simply ‘Youth Apathy’.

- Preliminary results point towards a lack of political and civic knowledge and efficacy.

- They raised issues of trust, corruption and negative media portrayal.

- Youth feel ignored.
Recommendations for the new TU Dublin

Berger (2009) three dimensions of Civic Engagement – Political, Social and Moral Engagement;

1. Community-based Learning (Social)
2. Ethical and Moral Reasoning Component (Moral)
3. Democracy Plaza (Political)
Community-based learning (service learning) as an alternative to work placements for students across all departments.

Sports Management students working with the elderly
Infusing Community-based learning across the Curriculum

**Connect**
- Community-Connected Department
- Department-Connected Community

**Design**
- Design of courses
- Student learning outcomes
- Meet the needs of the local community/organisation.

**Implement**
- Direct community based learning
- Indirect community based learning
- Advocacy community based learning
- Research community-based learning
**Ethical and moral reasoning component**

How will students’ prejudices affect their ability to relate to others?

Will students have their stereotypes reinforced?

Will students adopt a saviour mentality or leave with a feeling of disconnection from the actual service they have provided?
Ethical and moral reasoning component

Self-Knowledge

Interpersonal Relationships

Introspection
Democracy plaza

How do we address students current:

- Lack of political knowledge.
- Low forms of public voice expression.
- Low tolerance for dealing with conflicting views.
A Democracy Plaza is a structure within the campus grounds that is wall to wall of blackboard panels. It also has tables and chairs for students to gather and sit within its confines. Its interior can also be used to host events.
• Engage in written debate
• Read and learn from others' comments on the blackboards
  • Host debates, talks, presentations
  • Guest speakers
• Assignments and class presentations
Concluding remarks

As Delanty (2000) argues “the great significance of the university is that it can be the most important site of connectivity in the knowledge society (and) a key institution for the formation of cultural and technological citizenship (and for) reversing the decline of the public sphere”.
thank you
References


