Implementing the Political Engagement Project in an Introductory
Communication Course: An Examination of the Effects on Students' Political
Knowledge, Efficacy, Skills, Behavior, and Ideology

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Abstract

This article details the results of a quasi-experimental study designed to assess the effects of participation in the Political Engagement Project (PEP) on students' political knowledge, efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, political behavior, concern for political issues, and political ideology. Findings demonstrated that students in PEP sections of an introductory communication course showed significantly larger pre- to posttest gains on virtually all of the measures. Specifically, analysis of difference scores indicated that, compared to the control group, both experimental groups (i.e., PEP without video production and PEP with video production) reported significantly greater increases in political knowledge, efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, and political behavior. However, the control group produced significantly greater increases in the concern for political issues measure as compared to the PEP with video production experimental group, while showing no significant differences in relation to the PEP without video production experimental group. Finally, there were no differences over time for any of the groups regarding the measure of political ideology.

The argument that political disengagement is a serious concern worthy of the attention of those in higher education is well documented in the extant literature (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta, 2006; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Stephens, 2003; Galston, 2003; Hillygus, 2005; Hunt, 2010; Hunt, Simonds, & Simonds, 2009; Hunt & Woolard, in press; Jacoby, 2009; Spiezio, Baker, & Boland, 2005). As Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, and Torney-Purta (2006) noted, "although college students and recent graduates continue to be more involved in politics and public life than their less educated peers," these groups also "show low levels of political participation, whether measured relative to prior generations or according to theoretical standards of participatory democracy" (p. 250). Yet, institutions of higher education have a long tradition of educating students for meaningful participation in American democracy (Jacoby, 2009). In the face of criticism that many in higher education have lost sight of civic education as they focus more on job preparation for students, the last 20-plus years have yielded numerous initiatives designed to promote civic learning. As noted poignantly in *A Crucible Moment*, "higher education has a distinctive role to play in the renewal of US democracy" (National Task Force, 2012, p. 2). Indeed, a growing number of campuses across the United States are implementing community- and service-based learning objectives into curricula and co-curricula (Butin, 2010; Musil, 2015; Saltmarsh, 2005; Smith, Nowacek, & Bernstein, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Woolard, 2015). Despite this renewed focus on civic engagement and service-learning, however, Beaumont et al. (2006) have argued persuasively that there remains a "lack of interest in promoting undergraduates' political engagement" (p. 250).

In an effort to address this lack of interest, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) partnered with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and *The New York Times* in 2007 to launch the Political Engagement Project (PEP). The creators of this initiative viewed the PEP as an important addition to the modern civic engagement movement in higher education, which they perceived as too heavily focused on apolitical experiences rather than direct political action (Goldfinger & Pressley, 2010). In their view, traditional civic engagement pedagogy falls short of equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to create long-lasting change in society. In other words, the civic engagement approach encourages students to become involved in their communities through a variety of service activities but often stops short of exposing them to the knowledge and skills necessary to solve these problems

through traditional political and policy processes (see Hunt & Woolard, in press, for a detailed review of the pedagogies of civic and political engagement).

The PEP began with eight universities tasked with the responsibility of developing and implementing curricular and co-curricular experiences designed explicitly to enhance students' political knowledge, motivation, and skills (see Goldfinger & Pressley, 2010, for a complete review of PEP activities). In addition, the original invitation sent to the eight institutions asked participants to "begin the project by focusing on a limited number of courses with an emphasis on the first year" (Hunt, 2010, p. 47). The authors of this article were involved in the PEP as coordinators and instructors of the basic communication course (a general education requirement for all first-year students) at our institution. Here, we present an overview of the pedagogical strategies we employed in implementing the PEP and our assessment results. We begin with a review of the literature regarding the efficacy of educating for political engagement.

Review of the Literature

Efficacy of PEP Pedagogy

Political engagement includes direct participation in electoral politics such as "voting, participating in campaigns or political parties, contacting elected officials, running for office, and the like" (Colby et al., 2007, p. 9). Looking beyond electoral politics, however, Hunt and Woolard (in press) noted that "instructors employing pedagogies of political engagement encourage student participation in formal and informal political discourse and public culture" (p. 540). The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) has argued that such instruction is essential in higher education since "Americans need to understand how their political system works and how to influence it" (p. 3). Similarly, Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold (2007) framed the imperative for educating for political engagement in the following terms:

> Preparation for informed citizenship should include some understanding of political institutions, processes, and issues, and it should include long-term interests, habits, and commitments that support at least a basic level of knowledge and engagement. It should also include the abilities to acquire and evaluate political information, to formulate and express opinions about important political issues, including those who have quite different views. Although these capacities can all be developed through informal as well as

> formal means, it would be hard to argue that people who lack them are well educated. (p. 277)

In addition, Colby et al. (2007) identified signature PEP pedagogies: discussion and deliberation; political research and action projects; speakers and mentors; placements, internships, and service-learning; and structured reflection.

The extant literature supports the efficacy of integrating the pedagogy of political engagement within a wide variety of undergraduate majors (Colby et al., 2007). In their seminal study of the pedagogy of political engagement, Beaumont et al. (2006) assessed the PEP as it was implemented in 21 programs and courses at a range of institutions. Using a pre- and posttest design without a control group, Beaumont et al. (2006) found significant pre- to posttest gains on several measures including political knowledge, political skills, and anticipated participation in future political activities. Importantly, exposure to the PEP did not significantly influence students' political ideology or party identification. The authors argued that this finding directly addresses a significant concern of PEP faculty who believe that their own political views might inadvertently influence students' political affiliations. Beaumont et al.'s (2006) research demonstrates that "this is not the case, and supports the legitimacy of these types of political engagement courses and programs" (p. 264). Additionally, Beaumont et al. (2006) found that students who entered the PEP courses with low levels of political interest demonstrated significantly larger effect sizes for most measures than their counterparts who entered the courses with a high level of interest in politics. Beaumont et al. (2006) also reported that "only the low initial interest group experienced significant increases in their sense of politically engaged identity and likelihood to engage in civic and political activity in the future" (p. 261).

Spiezio, Baker, and Boland's (2005) research also supports the claim that these pedagogical strategies can influence the civic competencies of students enrolled in general education courses. Their study included more than 1,200 students enrolled in 39 courses at four colleges and universities. Spiezio et al. found that students exposed to these pedagogies demonstrated significant pre- to posttest gains on measures of the importance of civic engagement, intent to interact with members of the community, confidence in their critical-thinking skills, and political efficacy. Perhaps most importantly, the authors argued that these pedagogies "can be incorporated into nearly all of the academic divisions that make up a typical college campus" (p. 290).

Taken together, these studies indicate that signature PEP pedagogies can be used in a wide variety courses and institutions to positively influence the development of students' political engagement skills without altering their political ideology. The next section of the article outlines our efforts to integrate the PEP into the general education program at our university through the basic communication course.

Political Engagement in the Basic Communication Course

Introductory communication courses have become staples of many general education programs (Cutspec, McPherson, & Spiro, 1999; Hunt, Novak, Semlak, & Meyer, 2005; Morreale, Myers, Backlund, & Simonds, 2016). The ability to communicate effectively is essential to developing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, success in the workplace, and meaningful citizen participation in a democracy (Westphal-Johnson & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Moreover, as Dance (2002) noted, the basic course is communication's "bread and butter" offering in that it "introduces new students to the discipline, provides continuing teaching opportunities for both permanent and adjunct faculty and often supports graduate programs through its staffing by graduate assistants" (p. 355). The role of the basic communication course in general education confers substantial political capital to the discipline on many campuses. Campus administrators often look to the basic course as an ideal setting and means for launching new initiatives because the course is typically embedded in the general education program.

The communication discipline is uniquely situated to facilitate political learning. According to Hunt, Simonds, and Simonds (2009), the discipline's pedagogical content knowledge related to communication, critical thinking, and information literacy complements the pedagogy of political engagement. In fact, as the authors argued, "teaching students how to communicate, think critically, evaluate information, and become politically engaged are mutually reinforcing and certainly consistent with the long-standing goal of liberal education to produce well-rounded and engaged citizens" (Hunt et al., 2009, p. 16). Further, political engagement skills rest on a foundation comprising the communication, critical-thinking, and information-literacy skills covered in most introductory communication courses. For example, in order to engage in political persuasion, students must have the verbal and argumentation skills needed to clearly articulate a position. In her seminal study on the effects of higher education on students' political engagement, Hillygus (2005) found that the best predictor of future

political engagement was training in communication. Hillygus concluded that the findings of her study "suggest that an educational system geared towards developing verbal and civic skills can encourage future participation in American democracy" (p. 41). Hunt et al. (2009) concluded that communication faculty are "uniquely qualified and distinctively competent to help students develop communication and political competence" (p. 23). This conclusion is further substantiated by Morreale, Myers, Backlund, and Simonds (2016), who argued that, "considering the centrality of communication in a democratic and increasingly diverse society, the basic communication course is crucial to preparing undergraduate students for competent participation in civic life" (p. 353).

Given that the basic course (COM 110) at our university is required of all first-year students—and in light of the PEP's focus on the first year—COM 110 served as an ideal platform for implementing and assessing political engagement pedagogy. COM 110 is a required component of the general education program and services approximately 1,700 students each semester (the university offers over 70 sections each semester, and every section is capped at 23 students). The focus of the course is public speaking, but COM 110 also includes units on group and interpersonal communication.

We began the process of redesigning COM 110 for political engagement under the premise that the new PEP pedagogies should be intentional, non-partisan, and included in all of the major units of the course (see Appendix for sample syllabus). COM 110 PEP instructors were asked to incorporate political examples in their lectures and assign reflection essays that required students to couple course concepts with political topics. In addition, students' informative, group, and persuasive speeches were required to address substantive sociopolitical issues.

The COM 110 curricular experiences were also designed to encourage students to grapple with social, political, economic, and other forces that undergird the specific issues that students were researching. In addition, because students wishing to become engaged citizens must possess the ability to work with others (Ehrlich, 2000), we attempted to enhance students' group communication and political engagement skills by modifying the group presentation assignment. In one of the experimental groups, students were asked to develop a grassroots-style campaign. The other experimental section also included the group presentation assignment; however, rather than developing a campaign, students were asked to produce a short documentary or social-issues film on their respective topics. All

students enrolled in PEP sections begin the group assignment by researching multiple, sometimes competing, perspectives on a current and controversial topic. Students then work together to develop a communication campaign or video that both raises public awareness and presents policies designed to address the root causes of the problems they isolate.

In some cases, PEP instructors represented in this study joined together to link sections in order to develop larger-scale campaigns. For example, one group of PEP faculty organized the Fell Hall Call to Action campaign, which resulted in the collection of over 6,000 items (i.e., food and clothing) to benefit the Salvation Army and Center of Hope outreach programs. PEP faculty also came together to create a voter registration and education campaign called Trust Me, I'm a Voter. Other PEP-related activities in COM 110 have included the following:

- Creation of a website (https://civicengagement110.wordpress.com) to disseminate PEP strategies to other COM 110 instructors.

- Partnership with community leaders designed to pair COM 110 students with community members and politicians as they address community needs.

- Participation in a pilot readership program with *The New York Times*. Several COM 110 instructors used the *Times* as a means for developing students' political understanding and knowledge.

- Development of monthly PEP workshops covering topics such as tips for helping students select political topics for informative speeches, avoiding political bias, and selecting guest speakers.

- Partnership with Milner Library to refine library training sessions in support of COM 110's political engagement learning objectives.

For the current study, we pilot tested the new PEP pedagogy in four sections of our basic communication course. As mentioned previously, two of these PEP-enhanced sections contained a video production requirement (i.e., a brief documentary or social-issues film) for the group speech; the other two sections developed a more traditional grassroots campaign for the group assignment. These experimental sections of the course were compared to two control sections that lacked any deliberate political engagement instruction. Beaumont et al. (2006) found that exposure to PEP pedagogy positively influenced numerous student

learning outcomes including political knowledge, political efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, political behavior, and concern for political issues. In addition, they found that PEP pedagogy had no effect on students' political ideology. Based on this scholarship, we advanced the following hypotheses:

- H_1: The experimental group participants will report higher gains on the measure of political knowledge than control group participants.

- H_2: The experimental group participants will report higher gains on the measure of political efficacy than control group participants.

- H_3: The experimental group participants will report higher gains on the measure of general interpersonal skills than control group participants.

- H_4: The experimental group participants will report higher gains on the measure of skills of influence and action than control group participants.

- H_5: The experimental group participants will report higher gains on the measure of political behavior than control group participants.

- H_6: The experimental group participants will report higher gains on the measure of concern for political issues than control group participants.

Given past research by Beaumont et al. (2006), we advanced the hypothesis (H_7) that no experimental group participants would report changes on the measure of political ideology.

Finally, few scholars have examined the use of video production as a strategy for enhancing political engagement. As a result, we developed the following research question (RQ) to help explore differences between students enrolled in the two experimental groups: To what degree does the manner in which students demonstrate political skills influence gains in measures of political engagement?

Method

Participants and Procedures

The convenience sample consisted of undergraduate students ($N = 196$) from basic communication course sections taught by three graduate teaching

assistants (GTAs). Female second-year GTAs were selected to control for any effects related to teaching experience or biological sex. All three instructors had previously received consistently high teaching evaluations. The students were not randomly assigned to the COM 110 sections because doing so would have disrupted the university's normal enrollment process; however, given that the course is required as part of the university's general education program for all freshmen, the students represented a wide range of academic majors. A pen-and-paper survey was used for both the pretest, given in the first two weeks of the semester, and the posttest, administered in the last two weeks. All procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

In addition to a control group (n = 61), two different experimental conditions were tested. In the first experimental group (n = 70), the instructor used the PEP curriculum without video production instruction. In the second experimental group (n = 65), the instructor used the PEP curriculum coupled with video production instruction (i.e., student-produced documentaries). Two sections of the basic course were assigned to each of the three conditions. The same instructor taught both sections in each condition, and both instructors in the experimental groups were trained in the PEP pedagogy and the implementation of the experimental condition used in their sections. It is worth noting that the present study addresses a gap in previous research by including a control group. The use of a control group allowed us to assess whether any effects we observed could be attributed to the PEP pedagogy rather than artifacts associated with normal instruction in COM 110.

Measures

Our pre- and posttest surveys included measures of political knowledge, political efficacy, political skills, political behavior, concern for political issues, and political ideology developed by Beaumont et al. (2006).

Political knowledge. The political knowledge measure included six items examining students' current-events knowledge. Participants rated their knowledge on a 5-point Likert-type scale with "1" representing "no knowledge" and "5" representing "in-depth knowledge." Sample items for this measure included: "current national or international political issues, such as those on the front of major newspapers'; "current local or state political issues, such as those dealt with by city councils or state agencies'; "political leaders and their roles"; and "current

economic issues." The political knowledge measure had a reliability of .87 in the pretest and .91 in the posttest.

Political efficacy. Participants responded to eight statements regarding their role in the political process on a 5-point Likert-type scale with "1" signifying "strongly disagree" and "5" signifying "strongly agree." The Likert-type scales measuring efficacy included the following items: "I feel that I have a good understanding of the political issues facing our country"; "I believe I have a role to play in the political process"; "When policy issues or problems are being discussed, I usually have something to say"; "I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people"; "I believe I need to stand up for my political views"; "I consider myself well qualified to participate in the political process"; "I can make a difference in my community"; "Political participation is an effective way of helping to address problems in my community." For the current study, the political efficacy measure had a reliability of .89 in the pretest and .92 in the posttest.

Political skills. Beaumont et al. (2006) devised two subscales related to political skills: general interpersonal and communication skills (eight items), and skills of influence and action (eight items). Participants rated their ability to complete specific activities on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with "1" signifying "cannot do this" and "5" representing "can do this very well." Items for the general interpersonal and communication skills measure included: "articulate my ideas and beliefs to others"; "make a statement at a public meeting"; and "assume the leadership of a group." Items for the skills of political influence and action measure included: "know whom to contact to get something done about a social or political problem"; "develop strategies for political action"; and "organize people for political action." In the current study, we recorded the following reliability coefficients for the general interpersonal and communication skills (pretest = .85, posttest = .83) and skills of influence and action (pretest = .94, posttest = .94) measures.

Political behavior. The political behavior pretest (14 items) queried students about their recent political activities, while the posttest (10 items) asked them to anticipate future political behavior. Specific items for this measure included: "contacted or visited a public official—at any level—to ask for assistance or to express your opinion"; "contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue"; "taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration"; "signed a

written or e-mail petition about a political or social issue"; "not bought something or boycotted it because of conditions under which the product is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces it"; "bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces it"; and "worked as a canvasser going door to door for a political candidate or cause." For the current study, the political behavior measure had a reliability of .84 in the pretest and .89 in the posttest.

Concern for political issues. Participants rated their concern for political issues on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with "1" representing "not at all" and "5" representing "a great deal." The issues covered by this measure (8 items) included the economy, poverty and homelessness, environment, national defense, health care, international relations, racial issues, and education. The concern for political issues measure had a reliability of .81 in the pretest and .78 in the posttest.

Political ideology. Participants rated their political ideology on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with "1" representing "extremely liberal" and "5" representing "extremely conservative."

Data Analysis

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted using SPSS to ascertain if instructional condition (i.e., control, PEP without video production, or PEP with video production) made a difference in the dependent variables of interest (i.e., students' political knowledge, political efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, political behavior, concern for political issues, and political ideology). The use of a MANOVA procedure was necessitated by the investigation of multiple dependent variables thought to be conceptually related, as well as the presence of multiple groups. In addition, the use of MANOVA was warranted to protect against Type 1 errors that we would have encountered by running multiple ANOVAs (for a detailed overview of the MANOVA procedure, see Allen, Titsworth, & Hunt, 2008). Difference scores were calculated by subtracting students' pretest scores from their posttest scores for the seven dependent variables prior to running the MANOVA. No control variables were included in the analysis. As a result, the larger, positive difference scores represent larger gains on the PEP measures over the course of the semester.

Results

Initially, all three groups were compared to determine if significant differences existed among them on pretest scores for the seven dependent variables. The only significant difference that emerged at the pretest stage was between the control and PEP without video production groups regarding skills of influence and action. However, since the control group had higher mean scores on this measure, the dependent variable was not excluded from further analysis.

A MANOVA was conducted to explore the pre- to posttest difference scores for all of the groups. Box's test was significant, thus prompting the use of Hotelling's trace as a more conservative test of significance than Wilks' lambda.[1] The overall MANOVA was significant, $\tau = .22$, $F(14, 356) = 2.73$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Univariate ANOVAs indicated significant differences among the groups for political knowledge, $F(2, 185) = 7.08$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$, political efficacy, $F(2, 185) = 12.08$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .12$, general interpersonal skills, $F(2, 185) = 6.26$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$, skills of influence and action, $F(2, 185) = 8.09$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$, political behavior, $F(2, 185) = 7.63$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and concern for political issues, $F(2, 185) = 3.64$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. However, no significant difference was found among the groups for political ideology, $F(2, 185) = .178$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$. See Tables 1 through 7 for descriptive statistics.

	Control Group	PEP without Video	PEP with Video
	($n = 61$)	($n = 70$)	($n = 65$)

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[1] Allen, Titsworth, and Hunt (2008) noted that a critical assumption of the MANOVA statistic is equal covariance between the dependent variables. The Box test evaluates that assumption. If the test is significant, researchers should use Hotelling's trace rather than Wilks' lambda to interpret the MANOVA.

Pretest	(*M* = 2.80, *SD* = .78)	(*M* = 2.50, *SD* = .77)	(*M* = 2.57, *SD* = .66)
Posttest	(*M* = 3.18, *SD* = .69)	(*M* = 3.45, *SD* = .91)	(*M* = 3.52, *SD* = .96)
Difference Score	(*M* = .38, *SD* = .68)	(*M* = .95, *SD* = 1.07)	(*M* = .95, *SD* = 1.06)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Political Knowledge

Note. Higher means indicate greater political knowledge. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

	Control Group (*n* = 61)	PEP without Video (*n* = 70)	PEP with Video (*n* = 65)
Pretest	(*M* = 2.98, *SD* = .82)	(*M* = 2.64, *SD* = .81)	(*M* = 2.83, *SD* = .77)
Posttest	(*M* = 3.07, *SD* = .86)	(*M* = 3.51, *SD* = .87)	(*M* = 3.54, *SD* = .84)
Difference Score	(*M* = .10, *SD* = .67)	(*M* = .86, *SD* = .98)	(*M* = .71, *SD* = .87)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Political Efficacy

Note. Higher means indicate greater efficacy. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

	Control Group	PEP without Video	PEP with Video

	(n = 61)	(n = 70)	(n = 65)
Pretest	(M = 3.65, SD = .64)	(M = 3.39, SD = .68)	(M = 3.47, SD = .71)
Posttest	(M = 3.83, SD = .56)	(M = 3.99, SD = .65)	(M = 4.02, SD = .53)
Difference Score	(M = .17, SD = .66)	(M = .60, SD = .69)	(M = .56, SD = .74)

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for General Interpersonal Skills

Note. Higher means indicate greater general interpersonal skills. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

	Control Group (n = 61)	PEP without Video (n = 70)	PEP with Video (n = 65)
Pretest	(M = 2.93, SD = .88)	(M = 2.49, SD = .83)	(M = 2.67, SD = .79)
Posttest	(M = 3.25, SD = .69)	(M = 3.48, SD = .95)	(M = 3.47, SD = .97)
Difference Score	(M = .32, SD = .74)	(M = .99, SD = .97)	(M = .80, SD = 1.08)

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Skills of Influence and Action

Note. Higher means indicate greater skills of influence and action. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

	Control Group (n = 61)	PEP without Video (n = 70)	PEP with Video (n = 65)

Pretest	(M = 1.71, SD = .59)	(M = 1.59, SD = .51)	(M = 1.60, SD = .48)
Posttest	(M = 1.92, SD = .63)	(M = 2.40, SD = .94)	(M = 2.38, SD = 1.00)
Difference Score	(M = .20, SD = .67)	(M = .81, SD = .94)	(M = .78, SD = 1.09)

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Political Behavior

Note. Higher means indicate greater political behavior. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

	Control Group (n = 61)	PEP without Video (n = 70)	PEP with Video (n = 65)
Pretest	(M = 3.45, SD = .60)	(M = 3.49, SD = .62)	(M = 3.61, SD = .62)
Posttest	(M = 3.79, SD = .56)	(M = 3.65, SD = .55)	(M = 3.65, SD = .54)
Difference Score	(M = .34, SD = .62)	(M = .16, SD = .64)	(M = .04, SD = .61)

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Concern for Political Issues

Note. Higher means indicate greater concern for political issues. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

	Control Group (n = 61)	PEP without Video (n = 70)	PEP with Video (n = 65)

Pretest	(*M* = 2.93, *SD* = .73)	(*M* = 2.92, *SD* = .89)	(*M* = 2.74, *SD* = .97)
Posttest	(*M* = 2.98, *SD* = .78)	(*M* = 2.90, *SD* = .89)	(*M* = 2.77, *SD* = .75)
Difference Score	(*M* = .06, *SD* = .61)	(*M* = -.02, *SD* = .90)	(*M* = .04, *SD* = .92)

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Political Ideology

Note. Higher means indicate greater liberalism in ideological beliefs. Pretest and posttest scores are on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Difference scores are calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

Post hoc tests revealed that both experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group in relation to political knowledge, political efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, and political behavior. In addition, no significant differences were discovered between the PEP with video production and PEP without video production groups for political knowledge, political efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, and political behavior. However, the control group significantly outperformed the PEP with video production group on the concern for political issues measure, while no significant difference was found between the control and PEP without video production groups on this same measure. Finally, there were no significant differences in students' political ideology from pretest to posttest among the three groups.

Discussion

The study findings supported hypotheses 1 through 5 as well as hypothesis 7. Compared to the control group, PEP instruction with and without video production improved students' political knowledge (H_1), political efficacy (H_2), general interpersonal skills (H_3), skills of influence and action (H_4), and political behavior (H_5). Contrary to expectations, the control group significantly outperformed the PEP with video production group, but not the PEP without video production group, on the concern for political issues measure (H_6). Importantly, before we implemented the PEP pedagogy, the COM 110 course goals included advancing students' abilities to function as citizens in a democracy. As a result, it

is possible that students in the control group gained a better appreciation for a variety of political issues as a result of their exposure to this instruction. Regardless, the findings only partially supported H_6, and additional research is needed to better understand the influence of the PEP pedagogy on students' concern for political issues. No significant differences were found among the three groups on the ideology measure; consequently, the findings did support H_7. Finally, in response to the RQ, the results indicated no significant differences between the two experimental groups on any of the seven measures, though the PEP without video production group did produce higher difference scores on efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, political behavior, and concern for political issues measures than the PEP with video production group. See Table 8 for a summary of findings by hypothesis or research question.

	Finding	Details
H$_1$	Supported	PEP with and without video improves students' political knowledge, compared to control group.
H$_2$	Supported	PEP with and without video improves students' political efficacy, compared to control group.
H$_3$	Supported	PEP with and without video improves students' general interpersonal skills, compared to control group.
H$_4$	Supported	PEP with and without video improves students' skills of influence and action, compared to control group.
H$_5$	Supported	PEP with and without video improves students' political behavior, compared to control group.
H$_6$	Partially Supported	Control group significantly outperformed PEP with video group, but not PEP without video group, on concern for political issues.
H$_7$	Supported	No significant differences among the three groups on the ideology measure.
RQ	No Significant Differences	No significant differences between experimental groups on any of the seven measures.

Table 7. Summary of Findings

Note. There were two experimental groups (PEP with video production and PEP without video production) as well as a control group examined in each hypothesis.

Taken together, these results were consistent with previous research indicating that instructors can successfully promote students' political learning utilizing intentional and deliberate political engagement pedagogy. Beaumont et al. (2006) found that even students who entered higher education with little interest in politics benefited substantially from strategies designed to encourage political engagement. Likewise, Spiezio et al.'s (2005) research illustrated that general education courses can feasibly serve as a platform for institutional commitments to the promotion of political engagement. Additionally, Hunt et al. (2009) argued that introductory communication instructors are uniquely qualified to deliver this pedagogy at a crucial time in the development of student citizenship. Perhaps most importantly, our analyses revealed no significant pre- to posttest differences for any of the groups on a measure of political ideology (e.g., a general measure of conservatism and liberalism). This finding supports previous research reporting that instructors can successfully implement the pedagogy of political engagement without altering students' political ideology (Colby et al., 2007). In other words, explicit, visible, and intentional efforts to promote students' political interests, knowledge, skills, and motivation have been shown to be both feasible and efficacious. Finally, by implementing a control group in the present study, we contributed to the literature in this area by demonstrating that the effects observed in the experimental conditions were not a result of chance, the course, or characteristics related to the students.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of the present study hold significant implications for the development of pedagogical content knowledge, particularly in an introductory communication course. Indeed, findings support the argument that the communication discipline's pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., the collective knowledge the discipline has developed regarding the best ways to teach communication; see Friedrich, 2002) should be expanded to include educational strategies for advancing students' political skills, motivation, and learning. While it may be clear to most students that communication skills can enhance their interpersonal relationships or their career aspirations, it may not be immediately clear what their responsibilities are as citizens in a democracy. For some instructors, educating for citizenship may be a quaint or archaic idea. However, it is important

that introductory communication courses, especially those that are part of a general education curriculum, teach and engender political engagement among their students. Because general education is defined as "the part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students, it forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities" (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], n.d.). One of the four essential learning outcomes under AAC&U's LEAP framework—personal and social responsibility—addresses the need for the PEP in general education. Specifically, this learning outcome states that general education programs should prepare students with civic knowledge and engagement, both locally and globally. In addition to identifying essential learning outcomes, the LEAP framework offers several principles of excellence that provide challenging standards for effective practices in teaching and learning. It is noteworthy that three of the seven AAC&U principles of excellence are particularly suited to oral communication instruction: "teach the arts of inquiry and innovation"; "connect knowledge with choices and action"; and "foster civic, intercultural, and ethical learning" (AAC&U, n.d.).

Hunt (2010) has noted that one significant barrier to faculty embracing the task of educating students for democracy is the perception that "they simply do not have the time to teach their discipline's standard curriculum and political engagement simultaneously" (p. 58). However, the findings of the present study demonstrate that teaching disciplinary knowledge is not mutually exclusive with educating for democracy. In our own efforts to include pedagogy for political engagement in COM 110, we have learned that such strategies complement our existing communication pedagogy. For example, we know that critical-thinking skills are essential if students are to become critical consumers and producers of information in a democratic society (Browne & Stuart, 2004; O'Keefe, 1995; Tsui, 2000). In other words, it is very difficult for members of a democracy to participate effectively if they cannot think critically. Similarly, students must be information literate in order to be politically engaged. As DeMars, Cameron, and Erwin (2003) argued, information literacy is "central to the practice of democracy" (p. 253). As a result, our lessons addressing critical thinking and information literacy are also geared toward enhance students' political competence. For instance, our discussions of argumentation and fallacies include an in-class analysis of recent political advertisements, which often contain several examples of fallacious reasoning.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present study was not without its limitations. First, although we employed an experimental design, there was not random assignment of students to the three conditions. Random assignment was not possible given the way students enroll for the course at our institution. The current design maximized ecological validity by testing the effects of political engagement pedagogy within the natural structure of the basic communication course. Second, as noted earlier, all of the instructors in the study were female GTAs. Our intent was to control for instructor differences based on biological sex and age; however, future research should examine a mix of instructors, as well as differences between levels of faculty (e.g., GTAs, non-tenure-track, and tenure-track faculty). Third, our assessment of the PEP pedagogy began during the 2007 presidential election cycle. This was obviously a historic election, and our students may have been primed for politics. However, the results from the control group (with the exception of concern for political issues) would suggest otherwise. As noted previously, we found no significant differences between the experimental groups, suggesting that the strategies employed in both conditions were equally effective in promoting political engagement. Future scholarship should extend our findings by exploring a range of pedagogical strategies for encouraging political engagement in order to enhance disciplinary pedagogical content knowledge. Finally, future research should examine the horizontal and vertical integration of the pedagogy of political engagement across a variety of majors.

Conclusion

The results of the present study indicate that a general education course can play a substantial role in the development of students' political learning, skills, and motivation. As noted in our introduction, the modern civic engagement movement in higher education has focused mainly on apolitical educational experiences for students. Our study addresses the need to educate students for direct political engagement by demonstrating that intentional and deliberate political engagement pedagogy can positively influence key student learning outcomes. In addition, our research suggests that political engagement pedagogy can complement pedagogical strategies designed to enhance disciplinary knowledge. Ultimately, the present study lends credence to the argument advanced by the founders of the Political Engagement Project—that higher education can and should play a significant role in advancing the political engagement skills of students. Our study supports this

argument and affirms that faculty teaching introductory communication courses are uniquely qualified to educate students for active participation in American democracy.

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Appendix

Sample PEP Syllabus for COM 110

Communication 110, Communication as Critical Inquiry   PEP with Video

TEXTS:

Simonds, C. J., Hunt, S. K., & Simonds, B. K. (2013). *Communication as critical inquiry* (5th ed. for Illinois State University). Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Simonds, C. J., Hunt, S. K., & Hooker, J. F. (2015). *Communication as critical inquiry: Supplementary materials packet*. Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing.

ALSO REQUIRED:

- Some mechanism that can record at least 8 minutes of video that can be uploaded to a computer (smartphone, tablet with video capabilities, laptop with web cam, or a friend/classmate with said technology).

- A working ISU email account

- A stapler (mini staplers work best and are portable)

- Note cards (4 x 6 or smaller)

- A folder

COMMUNICATION AS CRITICAL INQUIRY (COM 110) COURSE GOALS:

Communication as Critical Inquiry (Com 110) seeks to improve students' abilities to express themselves and to listen to others in a variety of communication settings. Effective oral communication is viewed as an essential life skill that every person must possess in order to function in today's society. The course emphasizes participation in a variety of communication processes in order to develop, reinforce, and evaluate communication skills appropriate for public, small group, and interpersonal settings. The course content and experiences will enable students to assume their responsibilities as speaker-listener-critic in a

culturally diverse world. In short, the course is designed to make students competent, ethical, critical, confident, and information literate communicators.

COM 110 addresses the following General Education outcomes:

II. intellectual and practical skills, allowing students to

    a. make informed judgments

    c. report information effectively and responsibly

    e. deliver purposeful presentations that inform attitudes or behaviors

III. personal and social responsibility, allowing students to

    a. participate in activities that are both individually life-enriching and socially beneficial to a diverse community

    c. interact competently in a variety of cultural contexts

IV. integrative and applied learning, allowing students to

    a. identify and solve problems

    b. transfer learning to novel situations

    c. work effectively in teams

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT (PEP):

Illinois State University was selected as one of eight institutions to participate in a national American Democracy Project initiative, the Political Engagement Project (PEP). The Political Engagement Project, directed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, addresses the serious problem of political disengagement in young people and advocates a dramatic increase in college and university efforts to strengthen student interest in politics. The primary mission of the Political Engagement Project is to enhance ISU students' awareness and understanding of political engagement and impact their level of political involvement and leadership. As a result, a significant portion of this course will

be dedicated to discussing important political issues. You can learn more about political engagement at ISU here: http://americandemocracy.illinoisstate.edu/

ASSIGNMENTS:

EXAMS: There will be one midterm exam and a comprehensive final exam. Exams will assess your understanding of communication concepts and theories, as well as your application and integration abilities.

SPEECHES: Each student will present two speeches:

> a. Informative speech (5-7 minutes w/ at least 4 sources)

> b. Group presentation (part of a 25-minute group presentation-10 sources)

All speeches must be completed to pass the course. Each presentation will be evaluated on content and delivery. Specific details will be clearly outlined in class. Typed outlines and bibliographies are required for each (a sample will be provided). You are always welcome to bring a preliminary outline to me for comments prior to your presentation date.

PORTFOLIO: The portfolio is a collection of your work in this course over the semester. It will represent your insights, observation, experiences, and reflections that illustrate course content. Although a detailed handout will be provided, the end product will consist of your Communication Improvement Profile (CIP) and Critical Thinking Self-Assessment (CTSA), copies of your draft and final outlines, self-critiques, a series of communication artifacts, a participation log, and a final communication analysis paper and CTSA.

QUIZZES AND ACTIVITIES: You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss and participate in activities associated with the readings. I will not lecture over the material you have read, rather I will synthesize the material into discussions and activities, of which, you will play a large role. In order to assess your preparation for class, I will give several unannounced quizzes throughout the

semester. The answers to these quizzes will be quite obvious to one who has read the material! You may NOT make-up a quiz. Also note, any/all materials are handed out only once. If you are not in class to receive them, you should obtain the information from a fellow student.

EVALUATION:

Informative Speech	100 pts.
Group Presentation	100 pts.
Portfolio	100 pts.
Midterm Exam	100 pts.
Final Exam	100 pts.
Quizzes/Activities	TBA

The grading scale is a standard ten percentage point scale:

90-100% = A ; 80%-89% = B; 70%-79% = C;   60-69% = D; below 60% = F

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR THREE-DAYS A WEEK

UNIT 1: IMMERSION

<u>Week 1</u>

Course Orientation/Introductions

What is the Political Engagement Project? Why is it important?

Assign "Interview as Biography"

"Interview as Biography"   Ch. 1

Communication Apprehension

Assign CIP, CTSA, and Portfolio

Defining Communication   Ch. 1

<u>Week 2</u>

Critical Thinking   Ch. 1

Glossary of Shared Vocabulary/Critical Thinking Terms

Ethical Communication

Ch. 2   (Negative Political Ads)

Perception and Self Concept   App. AA

                                                                        CIP &

CTSA DUE

<u>Week 3</u>

UNIT 2: MESSAGE CLARITY

	Assign Informative Speech	
14	Topic Selection: Sample PEP Topics	Ch 4 &
	What is Information Literacy? Why is it Important?	
	Audience Analysis	Ch. 5

Week 4

	Supporting Your Ideas	Ch. 7
	Tests of Evidence	
	Organization	Ch. 8

Week 5

	Introductions & Conclusions	Ch. 9
	Sitcom Character Preparation	
	Sitcom Character Presentations	
	Outlining	Ch. 10
	Delivery	Ch. 12

Week 6

	Visual Aids	Ch. 13
	Language	Ch. 11
	Speech Tips/Reminders	
	Assign Peer/Self Evaluations	

Week 7

> Informative Speeches

Week 8

> Informative Speeches
>
> MIDTERM EXAM

UNIT 3: MESSAGE RESPONSIVENESS

Week 9

> Group Presentation Assigned   App. BB
>
> Media Literacy & Political Communication
>
> Group Communication   App. CC
>
> Assigning Roles for Short Issue Films

Week 10

> Shooting and Editing Short Issue Films
>
> Cultural Influences   App. EE
>
> Listening   Ch. 3
>
> Argumentation and Fallacies   App. FF

Week 11

> Managing Conflict   App. DD

UNIT 4: PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

Discuss Fact, Value, and Policy   Ch. 15

Organizing Persuasive Speeches

Central Statements and Previews

<u>Week 12</u>

Persuasive Appeals (Ethos, Pathos, and Logos)   Ch. 16

Refuting Counterarguments/Audience Analysis

Toulmin Argument Model   Central

Statements DUE

<u>Week 13</u>

Persuasion Activities

<u>Week 14</u>

NO CLASS

Thanksgiving Break

<u>Week 15</u>

Speech Tips/Reminders

Assign Synthesis Paper and CTSA

Assign Portfolio

Final Editing of Issue Films

<u>Week 16</u>

Final Presentations

UNIT 5: SYNTHESIS

Review for Final   Synthesis
Paper & CTSA

Reflection and Synthesis of Course
Portfolios DUE

TBA   **FINAL EXAM**

Author Biographies

Dr. Stephen Hunt serves as Professor of Communication and Executive Director of the School of Communication at Illinois State University. He recently completed an assignment serving as Chair of Illinois State's American Democracy Project. As a Carnegie Fellow for Political Engagement, he helps lead national efforts to sharpen the political and civic leadership skills of today's college students. Hunt is the author of over 30 scholarly articles, many focused on civic and political engagement, and is co-author of a public speaking textbook focused on critical thinking and civic engagement that is used by several communication departments throughout the country. Hunt earned his Ph.D. in communication education from Southern Illinois University in 1998.

Dr. Kevin R. Meyer serves as Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator in the School of Communication at Illinois State University. His research interests include instructional communication, communication education, graduate teaching assistant training programs, health communication campaigns, as well as sports apologia and image repair. He earned his Ph.D. in communication from Ohio University in 2009.

Dr. John Hooker is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Illinois State University and Co-Director of the Communication As Critical Inquiry program that all first-year students at the University complete. This course promotes civic and political engagement. Hooker earned his Ph.D. in Mass Media and Society from Purdue University in 2010.

Dr. Cheri J. Simonds has served as the Co-Director of Communication as Critical Inquiry at Illinois State University for the past 20 years. Her research interests include instructional communication, communication pedagogy, and communication assessment. She earned her Ph.D. in communication from Oklahoma University in 1995.

Lance R. Lippert is an Associate Professor and the Program Coordinator for the Communication Studies Program in the School of Communication at Illinois State University. Recently, he completed six years as the Coordinator of the University's Civic Engagement and Responsibility Minor which he started along with the civic engagement course redesign initiative. Lippert received a grant from the McCormick Foundation to embed civic engagement learning outcomes into courses across the curriculum. Lippert has published on topics in the areas of organizational, health, and instructional communication. He has also consulted with various non-profit, public, private, and governmental organizations to assist them improve organizational effectiveness. Lippert earned his Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.