

New Resources for Civic Engagement: The National Survey of Student Leaders
and the Consortium for Inter-Campus SoTL Research

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Abstract

Given increasing calls for higher education to promote students' civic and political engagement, the Consortium for Inter-Campus SoTL Research (CISR) was established to facilitate cross-campus data collection for civic engagement and pedagogy research. CISR's inaugural project, the National Survey of Student Leaders (NSSL), is the first effort to rely on scholarly insights about the role voluntary associations play in political socialization in order to systematically assess the quality of the learning experiences provided by student clubs and organizations. The NSSL provides higher education institutions with the means to regularly assess whether civil society on campus promotes the priorities of the civic engagement movement. This article relays findings from the first wave of the NSSL, while highlighting the types of campus-level data available from this new assessment tool.

Keywords: civic engagement, political engagement, college students, higher education, civic education, civil society, student life

Overview

This article provides information about two new resources for faculty and staff who seek to promote and assess curricular and extra-curricular initiatives designed to promote civic learning and democratic engagement. The article begins with a detailed summary of a new national survey designed to measure the degree to which student organizations develop students' civic skills and political efficacy. Readers are invited to participate in future waves of the study and to use the results of the campus survey to improve the civic outcomes associated with campus life. The article includes information about a new consortium designed to promote inter-campus research on the most effective ways to enhance civic and political knowledge, skills, and engagement. Working together, scholars and practitioners nationwide can develop and share best practices in civic education.

Introduction

Colleges and universities are increasingly called upon to promote students' civic engagement and political participation. Efforts to achieve these outcomes have historically focused on coursework, with heavy emphasis on in-class learning supplemented by service-learning projects in the community (Strachan, 2015). Yet, this emphasis on learning experiences tied to coursework overlooks a key opportunity to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and identities that predict civic and political engagement—that is, students' participation in extracurricular campus clubs and organizations. Political observations, ranging from Alexis de Tocqueville's description of voluntary associations as American "schools of democracy" to contemporary social scientists' well-vetted and longstanding findings, have documented that the best predictor of persistent adult civic and political participation is not formal instruction but civic voluntarism (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 2000; Schlesinger, 1944; Skocpol, Gans, & Munson, 2000; Tocqueville, 1969; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady 1995; Warren, 2001a, 2001b). In short, active and overlapping membership in the myriad voluntary associations that comprise civil society—even when all of these organizations do not serve an overtly political function—is the lynch-pin of robust political socialization that sustains long-term civic and political engagement (Edwards, 2014). Further, while the erosion of American civic infrastructure means that fewer Americans have the opportunity to participate in voluntary associations (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003), a rich array of student clubs and organizations has been preserved on college campuses. Significantly, if colleges and universities fail to situate student life at the

center of students' civic and political learning, they will overlook the experience that social science research identifies as one of the best ways to promote such engagement (McFarland & Thomas, 2006).

Not all civic organizations provide healthy political socialization. Some simply fail to incorporate organizing structures and decision-making practices that teach civic and political skills or that cultivate political interest (Skocpol, 2003). Meanwhile, others—with hate groups such as the KKK serving as the most egregious example—promote behaviors and attitudes that undermine democracy (Fiorina, 1999; Levi, 1996; see Sidanius et al., 2004 for concerns about certain types of campus organizations, but see also Rosenblum, 1998 for a defense of extending the right of association to all but the most dangerous groups). Hence scholarly work on civil society and voluntary associations should inform assessments of the campus version of civil society, in order to promote best practices associated with healthy civic and political socialization.

Higher education scholars celebrate the benefits that accrue to students who are active in campus life (Kuh 1995)—benefits that notably mirror the bridging and bonding social capital that group members acquire through broader civil society (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). Until now, however, no effort has been made to draw on the social science literature on voluntary associations to identify, assess, and promote best practices in the campus version of civil society. The goal of this article is to describe a new assessment tool purposefully designed to offer such insights. The authors begin with a more in-depth review of literature to justify this approach, followed by a description of the National Survey of Student Leaders (NSSL), which was designed and implemented for the first time in the 2014-2015 academic year by the Consortium for Inter-Campus SoTL Research (CISR) (see Appendix B for more information about CISR.) Rather than report a single finding from this work, the remainder of the article grounds each series of items included in the NSSL in the social science literature and describes insights for improving student life that can be garnered from those items. The goal of this work is to increase both scholars' and student-affairs staff's familiarity with a new tool for assessing civic engagement on their campuses.

Literature Review

The Role of Higher Education in Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

Many scholars and policy makers have been calling for higher education institutions to cultivate healthy civic and political engagement among college students. Such calls (Bok, 2006; Boyer, 1987; Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003; Colby et al., 2003, 2007; Ehrlich et al., 2000; Galston, 2001) were initially triggered by young citizens' seeming withdrawal from participation in public life, accompanied by poor youth turnout at the polls and a declining interest in politics overall. The rejection of explicitly political participation hit historic lows throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Wattenberg, 2012; Zukin et al., 2006). Elinor Ostrom, president of the American Political Science Association in the mid-1990s, responded to these downward trends by calling for a renewed commitment to civic education within the discipline and establishing the APSA Task Force on Civic Education (1998). After considering the issue, members of this committee concluded that "levels of political knowledge, political engagement and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in the United States" (p. 636).

Students' rejection of the most traditional means of civic and political participation occurred despite the civic engagement movement's success in establishing service-learning experiences on campuses, increasing young people's concerns about pressing public issues, and increasing overall rates of youth voluntarism (Strachan, 2015). Indeed, some observers have found such patterns reassuring because they think voluntarism and interest will eventually lead to more proactive civic and political engagement (Dalton, 2008). Others, however, are deeply concerned that young Americans now seem to purposefully avoid more traditional means of civic and political collective action, turning instead to face-to-face voluntarism to address their public concerns. Young people are also apt to exchange traditional means of participation for political consumerism (which involves both boycotting and "buy-cotting" products), but this form of collective action is designed to change business practices rather than government policies (Zukin et al., 2006). Critics are concerned that while voluntarism and political consumerism are valuable in and of themselves, robust democracies also require more purposeful civic and political efforts to influence public choices. Specifically, their concern is that volunteering can supplement activities (e.g., coordinated collective action and voting) that are purposefully undertaken to change public policies and practices, but cannot entirely replace them. Boyte (1991), one of the most explicit critics of civic education and political socialization on college campuses, has warned that college "appears to leave students without concepts or

language to explore what is political about their lives” (p. 765). His fears seemed confirmed when more than half of graduating college seniors reported in the 2002-2003 NSSE that their college experience had little or no effect on their plans to vote in the future (Kuh & Umbach, 2004). Indeed, scholars have been surprised to find that increased access to college education—an experience historically linked to higher levels of both civic and political engagement—has not been enough to counteract the generational decline in Americans’ participation in public life (Putnam, 2000).

Although today’s youth are still far less likely to participate in civil society than their parents or grandparents were (CIRCLE, 2011), targeted mobilization of young citizens in Obama’s 2008 and 2012 campaigns helped to reverse the trend of low voter turnout patterns. Concerned scholars and pundits experienced a temporary respite—only to realize that this heightened interest in politics and voting was contextual. As many nationwide public opinion polls as well as voter turnout in the most recent midterm, special, and primary elections have indicated, paying attention to current events, joining community organizations, and turning out at the polls have not become ingrained habits for the youngest generation of American citizens (Harward & Shea, 2013).

Rediscovering Student Groups as a Tactic for Promoting Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

Given that early levels of civic and political interest and participation help to predict long-term adult engagement, it is increasingly important to identify effective ways to provide college students with meaningful civic education experiences. Professors who respond to such concerns are likely to focus on the substantive content of their courses as a way to shape student awareness of their civic and political obligations. Such efforts make considerable sense, as academics have a great deal of control over their classrooms but often have very little say about what happens elsewhere on campus. Yet, social scientists have long known that participation in civil society (e.g., clubs and voluntary associations) is one of the best predictors of long-term adult civic and political participation—but only when clubs and organizations are structured in ways that build students’ civic and political skills, efficacy, and identities (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 2000; Schlesinger, 1944; Skocpol, Gans, & Munson, 2000; Tocqueville, 1969; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Warren, 2001a, 2001b). Further, some organizations, such as those that facilitate interaction with diverse others, are much better at

cultivating the broad trust in others and inclusive definitions of citizenship required to sustain democracy in a multicultural country like the United States. Other groups may actually undermine these desired outcomes, especially those that primarily facilitate interaction among people who are very similar (Edwards, 2014).

Higher education research regularly identifies participation in student life as an important and highly beneficial college experience (Kuh, 1995). Students who participate make gains in both persistence and academic performance (Huang & Chang, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1984, 1993) argued that students' learning and development correspond to the quality and intensity of their involvement, while Kuh et al. (1991) emphasized that an engaged student culture and peer norms can reinforce the liberal arts mission. In addition to academic performance, engaged students gain higher levels of personal development (Fouber & Urbanski, 2006) and enhanced leadership skills (Schuh & Laverty, 1983), the ability to maintain mature, intimate relationships (Hood, 1984), and to secure higher post-college income (Pace, 1979). Wilson (1966) went so far as to posit that 70% of what students learn during college results from extracurricular programming. Pace (1979) likewise extolled student life, claiming it to be the only college experience predictive of adult success, no matter how "success" is defined. Similar to civil society, much of what students learn in campus life relates to political participation even when groups do not serve an overtly political function. For example, Pascarella, Ethington, and Smart (1988) found that campus involvement predicted altruism and broader concern for society, just as Tocqueville (1969) argued that such experiences helped Americans learn that self-interest "rightly understood" is connected to healthy communities.

However, neither higher education scholars nor social scientists who understand the strong connection between associational life and healthy democracy have studied the structure of civil society on their very own campuses. Hence the Consortium for Inter-Campus SoTL Research (CISR)—which was established to facilitate research projects requiring collaborative, cross-campus data collection to assess the effectiveness of civic engagement and political science learning initiatives—conducted the first wave of the National Survey of Student Leaders (NSSL) in the 2014-2015 academic year.

A New Assessment Tool

The NSSL represents the first attempt to rely on social science expertise to systematically assess the quality of the learning experiences provided by student clubs and organizations. With campus-recruiting assistance provided by the CISR, the American Political Science Association (APSA), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the NSSL was administered to student officers representing 5,567 registered student organizations on 36 participating campuses. These included community colleges, regional public universities, small liberal arts colleges, and research-intensive universities located in every major region of the continental United States and in one European country.

An initial request to participate and two reminder prompts were e-mailed to the presidents of these student organizations, yielding 1,896 responses. For campuses that made additional contact information available, an invitation to participate and two reminder prompts were sent to a secondary contact (typically a vice president or a treasurer) when the president failed to respond. This follow-up effort yielded an additional 297 responses. Of the initial sample of 5,567 student officers, 2,193 answered the questionnaire, for an overall response rate of 39.3%. Given that responses to Internet questionnaires tend to be lower than other means of conducting survey research, this response rate was somewhat higher than expected. Introductory e-mails sent by members of each campus' student life staff established the project's credibility with respondents and helped to bolster the response rate.

Student leaders were asked to report their own demographic traits as well as the demographic composition, mobilizing capacity, and purpose of their groups to determine whether campus civil society provides adequate opportunities for all members of the student body. Further descriptive information was requested to ascertain if campus groups have adopted the organizational structures, cross-cutting interactions, activity levels, and decision-making procedures recommended by scholars of associational life. This set of questions was newly developed for the NSSL.

Additional questions were modified from established social science instruments, such as the American National Election Study and CIRCLE's Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey, to assess student organization leaders' perceptions of bridging and bonding social capital and of the organizational pursuit

of civic and political goals. A final series of questions, derived and modified from the same established surveys, measured student leaders' levels of social trust, political interest, anticipated political participation, and efficacy.

The NSSL serves a number of purposes. The NSSL will contribute to new scholarly insights into whether campus associational life fulfills its potential as a means of preparing students for participation in democracy. Just as important, however, the NSSL also provides a new assessment tool for individual campuses. Campuses participating in the NSSL received an in-depth campus report, which established a baseline assessment of each institution's civic infrastructure and offered suggestions for improvement. As the NSSL becomes institutionalized and is administered on a regular schedule, it will provide more higher education institutions with the means to regularly assess whether their version of campus civil society promotes the priorities of recent higher education reform. The ensuing sections of this article are intended to increase readers' familiarity with the national-level data from the first wave of the NSSL, along with the types of questions included on this new assessment tool.

Overview of the 2014-2015 NSSL

Demographic Information; Matching Student Body Composition to that of Student Leaders

The NSSL asked student organization officers to provide information about their basic demographic traits. Generally, the proportion of students serving as officers from each demographic group should roughly reflect each group's proportion of the overall student body on the campuses surveyed. When demographic information is reported at the campus level, faculty and administrators should also be able to determine if any particular demographic group is underrepresented in such roles, which could indicate that members of that group have fewer campus leadership opportunities than other types of students. Tables 1 to 5 in Appendix A report students' class status, gender, age, international status, and racial and ethnic identity across all 36 participating campuses.

Demographic questions were included in the study because they will help to determine whether additional efforts are required to engage certain types of students in leadership opportunities. For example, the high percentage of women, at nearly 62%, serving in leadership positions in part reflects the fact that approximately 57% of college students nationwide are women, but it also likely

reflects that male students are less likely to seek out extracurricular experiences without encouragement (Sax, 2008). Given varying enrollment patterns across institutions, campuses participating in the NSSL were encouraged to compare the composition of their student body to campus-level demographic patterns in student life experiences to help determine whether additional efforts are required to engage certain types of students in leadership opportunities. Indeed, several of the 36 campuses participating in the inaugural wave of the NSSL responded to their campus-specific data by establishing new recruiting protocols to improve the diversity of their student leaders.

Purpose of Organizations; Facilitating Political Agendas

Participation in student life has been linked to increased persistence and improved academic performance, especially among students who are at high risk for dropping out of college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, it is important to have a wide array of different types of groups that will appeal to a diverse student body. Fisher (2007) recommended that at least some campus groups should be dedicated to serving members from minority and marginalized groups, as these organizations provide a “safe space” for these students to gather. In order to mimic the type of public sphere that promotes democracy, a rich array of different kinds of student groups is also required to provide healthy civic and political socialization (Edwards, 2014). Individual organizations provide opportunities for networking, civic skill development, and the development of trust among those similar to oneself, or bonding social capital. Meanwhile, overlapping memberships and activities that cut across groups help to promote interaction with diverse others, help students develop an inclusive definition of citizenship, and cultivate generalized trust in others, or bridging social capital (Putnam 2000).

Similar to the overall nature of associational life in broader society, many student organizations are likely established to serve recreational interests or professional goals (Putnam, 2000). Intramural sports and career-based professional organizations are both important parts of student life, and coordinating their activities can still provide important skills that readily translate into efforts to influence civic and political outcomes. Yet, at least some organizations on campus should have overtly civic and political agendas, to help students learn to connect the organizing skills they gain to the ability to influence public decision making (Skocpol, 2003). A series of questions were therefore included in the NSSL to provide insight into the array of groups present on most campuses and to determine

if at least some of these groups are providing explicit opportunities for civic and political leadership.

First, student officers were asked to select the category that best described the purpose of their organization. (Some campuses included residence hall associations and varsity sports among their list of registered organizations. Even though these types of campus units are often not categorized as student clubs, they are included here). In a similar question, the survey asked these student officers to identify their organization's most important function (see Tables 6 and 7 in Appendix A, which provide the full array of responses to these prompts).

Given the long-term trend of college students prioritizing financial security and career success over other potential outcomes from their time in college (Berrett & Hoover, 2015; Sander, 2013), it is not surprising that student groups focusing on providing academic and professional experiences are more numerous than any other type of group, as 15.2% of student officials claimed an academic purpose, while another 13% linked their group to a profession. Similarly, 26.6% of student leaders saw their group's most important function to be preparing members for a career. Those hoping that college will trigger active citizens may find these preferences troubling. Moreover, the relatively low number of organizations promoting explicitly political participation, which hovers around 3% in both tables, may add to these concerns. Some may find solace in the number of organizations focused on narrow policy issues (12.8%), on providing opportunities for community service (8.3%), and on bringing attention to an important issue in society (15%). However, these groups' popularity likely reflects the recent trend of college students preferring to address public issues through voluntarism rather than traditional political participation (Zukin et al., 2006). Hence staff and faculty members may need to encourage students to see the connections between their recreational, professional, and civic interests, and the public policies that affect them.

Membership Composition of Student Groups; Providing Safe Gathering Spaces on Campus

Student officers were also asked to indicate the type of student members their organizations were intended to serve. While most student organizations are intended to attract all types of students on campus, some are created to specifically

serve the needs of particular demographic groups on campus. As indicated earlier, robust civil society will include a mix of both types of organizations. For example, institutions with a substantial minority population should be concerned if none of the groups on campus provide that population with a comfort zone. Fisher (2007) found that, for minority students, extensive formal ties on campus were linked to higher grades and reduced the likelihood of dropping out by about 83%. Similar findings have indicated that when African-American males are socially integrated on campus, they earn higher grades (Jackson & Swan, 1991; J. E. Davis, 1994). They are more apt to be socially integrated on all Black campuses, however, because the student clubs and organizations are more likely to be welcoming and to match their interests. Feelings of alienation and sources of social support affect minority students, especially when they attend predominantly White colleges (Jackson & Swan 1991; R. Davis, 1994). Fisher (2007) recommended that minority students in particular should be encouraged to join extracurricular groups during orientation. Further, colleges should ensure that enough organizations exist to allow these students to feel comfortable joining. While this research specifically addressed the experiences of ethnic minorities and African-American men, it stands to reason that members of other historically marginalized groups—such as women or LGBTQ students—are likely to have similar experiences on campus and are likely to benefit if they can join student groups specifically intended to provide them with support on campus.

Table 8 in Appendix A reveals that a small percentage of student groups analyzed in the NSSL are intended to serve these types of students on campus. While 6.8% served female members (a result of the popularity of sororities on campus), only 3.9% restricted membership based on racial or ethnic identity, while less than a single percent provided a safe gathering space for sexual minorities. These percentages suggest that the 36 participating institutions have an opportunity to make their campuses more welcoming and to increase the persistence and academic performance of the types of students most likely to feel alienated on a typical college campus, simply by working to increase the number of campus groups that serve their specific interests (see Strachan & Owens, 2011 for a more in-depth discussion of diversity and student life).

Organizational Representation in Student Government Associations; Bolstering Political Connections

On some campuses, student officers from certain types of groups automatically serve as representatives in the student government association. This practice provides student officers with experiences that foster more explicit political socialization, even if their student club or group is not overtly political. Only a minority of campuses (20.5%) implemented this practice (see Table 9 in Appendix A), suggesting another opportunity for most institutions to help students link their participation in civil society to their ability to wield political influence.

When reported at the campus level, the type of information described in the preceding sections provides insights that can be used for a campus-specific assessment about whether student groups serve a diverse array of student interests, with ample opportunities for participation that provide not only recreational activities, but also more explicit civic and political experiences.

Basic Membership Information; Improving the Capacity to Mobilize for Collective Action

Critics of campus life have expressed concern that student groups, reflecting deeper trends in associational life, are becoming “check-book” organizations, in which students pay membership dues but have little opportunity to participate in organizational decision-making and program implementation (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Skocpol, 2003). In addition, they fear that student groups increasingly address only narrow interests, with fewer organizations capable of bringing students together in collective action across campus and beyond (Levine & Cureton, 1998). This concern differs from the types of members recruited, addressed earlier. For example, student professional associations, such as the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), are open to all students on campus, but they address very particular sets of issues not likely to mobilize a broad swath of the student body. Responses to specific questions provide information about whether these patterns have taken root on college campuses.

Student officers were asked to report the number of members who regularly participate in organizational activities. Across all 36 campuses, this number ranged from 0 to 550, with an average of 26.1 active members. According to respondents, these active members participated an average of 10.8 hours each month, with estimates ranging from 0 to 160 hours. (A small number of students claimed that active members participated a full 40 hours a week. While it may not seem likely,

it is possible that a small number of students treat participation in student life like a full-time job. Thus, these estimates were included in the average score.)

In comparison, student officers reported that the overall number of members (both active and inactive) ranged from 1 to 1,000, with an average of 67.1 members. (Note, however, that 99% of the organizations included in the national sample had 500 or fewer members. The 2% of organizations with membership ranging from 500 to 1,000 were typically national honor societies, in which members are required to meet a minimum GPA requirement, not to actively participate in organizational activities or decision making).

Finally, respondents were asked to report the total number of students (beyond members) they thought they could mobilize across the entire campus. This estimate ranged from 0 to 1,000, with an average of 62.5 students.

This type of information will help individual campuses assess whether students are actively engaged in organizational activities, and whether at least some student groups are able to mobilize a substantial portion of the student body to engage in collective action in pursuit of an overarching goal or in support of a popular cause. While a small number of students are very actively engaged, most student groups currently appear to lack the capacity to mobilize large groups of students around an important or popular cause. Yet, organizations that provide such capacity in the public sphere—especially when mobilizing ability cuts across larger geographic areas—have historically played an important role in training civic and political leaders (Skocpol, 2003). When the infrastructure of student organizations does not provide student leaders the ability to engage in large-scale collective action on issues that they care about, an important opportunity to bolster civic and political organizing skills, as well as political efficacy, has been lost.

Elected and Appointed Executive Positions; Increasing Familiarity with Democratic Processes

Organizations that hold elections and have multiple executive positions provide democratic learning opportunities. The sheer number of civic organizations with elected positions in America's past was celebrated as a way to provide leadership opportunities to a substantial portion of Americans (Schlesinger, 1944; Skocpol, 2003). Even with nearly 90,000 local government units in the U.S., few Americans will have the opportunity to experience democratic decision making first-hand by serving as elected officers. At its zenith, American civil society

provided this direct learning experience for at least 3% to 5% of the adult population in 1955, whereby they learned “how to run meetings, handle moneys, keep records, and participate in group discussions” (Skocpol, 2011, p. 115). This pattern was apparently well-established by the late 1800s, when one observer jokingly described the plethora of official positions available in America’s “thousand and one societies” as “the great American safety valve” (Hill, 1892, as cited by Skocpol, 2011, p. 114). Student officers were therefore asked to indicate the number of executive positions within their organizations, how frequently they turn over, and whether they are elected or appointed.

Overall, 62.7% of respondents indicated that these executive positions were elected by the full members; 28.8% indicated that they were appointed by group leaders or a faculty advisor; and 8.5% explained that their group relied on a combination of other selection practices, which typically involved a combination of elections and appointments for selected group leaders (see Table 10 in Appendix A).

While a significant majority of officers in campus organizations are elected, shifting even more groups into this category may be a simple way for campuses to improve students’ familiarity with the concept and process of democratic elections, along with the responsibilities of serving in an official position.

Federated Structure; Mobilizing for Collective Action across Geographic Distance

Scholars of American associational life have argued that a federated structure (with national, state, and local chapters) provides civic organizations with improved ability to influence policies across geographic boundaries. Such a structure can, for example, influence policies across an entire state or promote similar policies in multiple states, as well as coordinate efforts to shape national policies. This ability bolsters civic and political efficacy, connecting members to persuasive efforts that extend beyond their local communities (Skocpol, 2003). It is important to note that these learning experiences readily translate into the ability to wield political influence, even when the organizations providing the lessons are not overtly political. The types of federated voluntary associations that have been praised for providing Americans with civic learning in the past include, for instance, mainline Protestant denominations, veterans associations, such as the VFW or the American Legion, and fraternal organizations, such as the Independent

Order of Odd Fellows or The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, because they provide opportunities to practice skills that civic and political leaders need to possess, like parliamentary procedure, committee work, and persuasive speaking (Charles, 1993; Hausknecht, 1962; Schlesinger, 1944; Skocpol, 2003; Skocpol, Gans, & Munson, 2000; Skocpol, Munson, & Camp, 2002).

Questions in the NSSL are designed to reveal whether student groups typically have a federated structure, as well as whether student delegates from campus chapters actively participate in setting the organizations' policies and priorities at the state and/or national level. As Table 11 in Appendix A indicates, fewer than 40% of the student organizations included in this study had a federated structure; yet, this is a substantial percentage of campus organizations, which may provide an opportunity for students' civic learning.

Even with a federated structure, however, it is possible that these groups function primarily as "check-book" organizations, with little opportunity for participation. Hence the officers with a federated structure were asked to summarize members' active participation within these groups (see tables 12 and 13 in Appendix A). A federated structure is linked to higher levels of active engagement, as almost 40% of students in federated organizations coordinated activities with a state chapter several times a semester, while almost 30% did so at the national level. In addition, well over half of the officers serving these federated organizations indicated that student delegates attended state and national conventions, where some had the opportunity to participate in developing organizational policies, deliberating on these proposals using formal parliamentary procedure, and voting to enact or reject them (see Table 14 in Appendix A).

These questions provide important tools for assessing the degree to which student life offers students opportunities to develop civic and political leadership skills, as a high proportion of organizations with a federated structure on campus would suggest that student members may gain heightened levels of civic and political efficacy. These gains increase if campus chapters not only coordinate activities across geographic boundaries, but also send delegates to state and/or national conventions, where they have the opportunity to influence organizational policies and priorities. However, given that these learning experiences often take place in groups without an overt political agenda, faculty and staff advisors may need to help students recognize the connection between these learning experiences

and the ability to resolve public concerns in their communities and to influence political processes.

On-Campus Organizational Activities and Group Decision-Making Styles; Teaching Civic and Political Skills

To serve as a mechanism of political socialization, organizations must meet and undertake activities on a regular basis. Prior studies of civil society have indicated that average Americans used to attend organizational meetings and functions quite regularly (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 2000; Schlesinger, 1944; Skocpol, 2003). These activities provided basic civic skills, such as using by-laws and constitutions to structure choices and engaging in deliberative decision making in formal public settings. They also provided civic leaders with the opportunity to cultivate common civic identities by celebrating organizational values and priorities in ceremonies, speeches, and written material. Table 15 in Appendix A reveals the extent to which student groups nationwide are engaging in these types of activities. It is troubling to note that about 20% of student officers reported that their organizations rarely if ever undertook several important activities including: requiring full-membership votes, coordinating educational events, or giving speeches. Even more student officers reported rarely, if ever, sponsoring fundraising events for themselves (38.2%) or others (41.7%), coordinating social programs (35.7%), or conducting a ceremony or ritual (56.1%).

Simply attending meetings and sponsoring events, however, is not enough to hone civic and political skills and to cultivate civic identity. Scholars have argued that internal organizational dynamics matter a great deal (Skocpol, 2003). Groups that mimic formal, deliberative decision-making procedures provide better training in a very important set of civic and political skills. Table 16 in Appendix A shows the extent to which student groups nationwide engaged in various types of decision making. Notably, many student officers reported that their groups undertook important activities—such as referring to a constitution or by-laws (31.3%), using formal decision-making rules (64.6%) or negotiating conflict with other members (30.7%)—less than once a year or never.

As these percentages indicate, not all groups on campus will have high activity levels, nor will they all rely heavily on democratic decision making. Some may rely on the advice of a faculty advisor or the decisions of an executive board. Yet, ideally, more campus organizations should provide robust learning

experiences by engaging all members in group discussion, deliberation, and decision making. Part of the reason for the limited use of these activities is likely that participation in voluntary associations, which used to be quite common—and quite influential—during childhood and adolescence, is now a missing aspect of youth political socialization (CIRCLE, 2006; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). In the past, students were much more likely to arrive on campus already knowing how to coordinate their student groups' activities. Now, many of these basic skills must be taught. Campuses can help to increase these types of beneficial experiences by providing additional mentoring or professional development workshops.

Perceptions of Organizational Influence; Bolstering Organizational Efficacy

As scholars have posited, undertaking the types of activities and deliberative decision making described above not only builds civic and political skills, but also bolsters self-efficacy or confidence in the ability to successfully undertake them. When members learn that their collective endeavors yield results, they can more easily imagine undertaking similar efforts in the future. Such efficacy is enhanced when their organizational activities stretch across geographic boundaries (Skocpol, 2003). Hence student officers were asked a series of questions in the NSSL intended to measure perceptions of their organizations' influence. Specifically, they were asked to assess whether their organizations had successfully attempted to influence policies on campus, in the local community, or at the state and national levels. They were also asked to assess whether their groups had undertaken successful volunteer efforts and persuasive social values/lifestyle campaigns at each of these levels, as well as whether their efforts required them to coordinate activities with other groups at each of these levels.

The more frequently student officers indicate that their groups influence policies and social values, undertake effective volunteerism, and coordinate efforts with other groups—especially when these activities stretch across geographic boundaries—the more likely members are to feel confident undertaking the same types of activities for civic and political purposes in the future. As Tables 17 to 20 in Appendix A make clear, students saw their organizations as most effective at coordinating collective endeavors and volunteering at the local level, and to a slightly lesser extent influencing others' social values at the local level. This perceived influence dropped when students were asked to estimate how frequently they influenced policymaking. However, many students' personal, professional, and community interests are deeply affected by politics. Virtually every student on

campus is affected by public policies that regulate their future professions or affect the community issues they are attempting to resolve via voluntarism, even if students themselves do not see these links. One of the strengths of civic infrastructure has always been the ability to mobilize members of an existing civic or recreational organization when issues directly affect them—a classic example being the American Legion’s sponsorship of members’ preferred version of the GI Bill after WWII (Bennett, 1996; Skocpol, 1997). This feature of civil society is why Robert Putnam cared so much that Americans, despite the continued popularity of bowling as a recreational sport, were no longer forming bowling leagues that he titled his seminal book on civil society *Bowling Alone* (2000).

Intramural sports teams might not care about local politics until budget cuts affect their access to public parks and playing fields. Fraternities and sororities might not care about local politics until zoning and noise ordinances affect their housing options. Student professional associations might not care about state or national politics until regulations affect future job prospects. When these types of issues inevitably arise on campuses, more efforts should be undertaken to help students recognize that the same efforts that make their clubs and organizations effective in other spheres will help them to pursue political outcomes.

Finally, comparing national patterns to campus-specific outcomes should help student affairs staff to decide whether to provide additional mentoring, networking, or professional development workshops to enhance group members’ experiences.

Bridging and Bonding Social Capital; Cultivating Support Networks and Trust in Others

Participating in associational life provides two types of beneficial side effects, often described as bonding and bridging social capital. Both refer to trust in others. Bonding social capital provides members with a strong identity that emerges from participating in a close-knit community (Campbell, 2006; Putnam, 2000). Because members interact regularly, they learn that they can trust and rely upon one another. Moreover, they develop a shared set of values and norms. Obviously, these close relationships are overwhelmingly helpful to the members of such close-knit groups. Even so, social scientists sometimes view bonding social capital with suspicion because it can also encourage the type of in-group prejudice

and disdain for others that can undermine willingness to deliberate with those who are different (Fiorina, 1999; Levi, 1996; van Deth & Zmerli, 2010).

Yet, civil society can also produce bridging social capital, which refers to trust in diverse others and which occurs when members of a group are dissimilar from one another. Bridging social capital also develops when groups with different membership composition regularly interact with one another. Members of all the groups learn to trust, respect, and cooperate with those whose values and circumstances are different from their own (Putnam, 2000, 2007).

Levels of bonding social capital can be important in helping students transition to and perform well in college. Further, it teaches students to cultivate the types of networks that can help them succeed long after they leave campus (Kuh et al., 1991). Bridging social capital, however, is essential in order for students not only to learn how to participate in a multicultural society, but also to cultivate inclusive definitions of citizenship that sustain liberal democracy in a diverse nation (Putnam, 2007). Healthy campus civil society should cultivate substantial levels of both—and fortunately the questions posed to student officers in the NSSL indicated that campus organizations are generating high levels of bridging and bonding social capital, as they overwhelmingly agreed and strongly agreed with all but one of the related items (see Tables 21 and 22 in Appendix A). Only about 50% of members agreed or strongly agreed that members feel obligated to address broad social or political issues, but over 90% indicated that members not only share core values, but that they respect differing views within the group.

If an NSSL campus report revealed that students in a particular setting scored lower on these items than preferred, student affairs staff might decide to provide incentives that promote desired outcomes by, for example, tying funding to activities that bolster trust in others or that require groups with diverse members to work together.

Diversity in Membership Composition; Bolstering Trust in Diverse Others

As noted earlier, a diverse membership is one way that group composition can bolster bridging social capital. Long-standing research on overcoming discrimination has also indicated that ongoing interaction with diverse others, especially in collective endeavors to achieve common goals, is the key to overcoming prejudice toward minority out-groups in society (Allport, 1953). Thus, group composition in campus civil society can help to bolster levels of bridging

social capital, to overcome prejudice against minorities, and to build inclusive definitions of citizenship.

Yet, these outcomes often do not occur (Strachan & Owens, 2011). Some campuses simply lack enough overall diversity in the student body to sustain adequate interactions across demographic difference. On other campuses, students prefer to cluster together with similar others in their on-campus groups. Certain questions in the NSSL were therefore designed to help assess whether student life is helping or hindering campus goals for diversity education and programming.

First, student officers were asked to assess the level of diversity within their groups based on several dimensions of diversity. Student officers perceived their groups to be at least mixed on most demographic traits, with the highest levels of perceived diversity reported for family income, partisanship, and religious affiliation. Further reflecting their awareness of these patterns, student officers were most likely to report wanting a greater mix of members to achieve increased levels of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity, as well as a broader array of academic majors (see Tables 23 and 24 in Appendix A).

Student officers were asked to report if they had at least one active member from specific racial and ethnic groups, as well as from different economic classes. Responses suggest that many student groups have at least some diversity in membership (see Tables 25 and 26 in Appendix A.)

Finally, student officers were asked to indicate whether their organizations promoted diversity by including a statement on diversity in their by-laws, by encouraging interactions with diverse others, by recruiting diverse members, and by requiring participation in diversity workshops or attendance at diversity programming. Officers were most likely to report, at 58%, that they encouraged interaction with diverse others and least likely to report, at 18%, that they explicitly recruited diverse members (see Table 27 in Appendix A). Given the low rates of affirmative responses on several of these items, student affairs staff who want to promote higher levels of diversity within student organizations likely have an array of options for doing so, ranging from providing recruiting assistance to promoting programming and workshops.

Requests for Assistance; Improving Learning Experiences that Enhance Civic Learning and Political Socialization

In addition to the assessment of campus associational life detailed in previous sections, it is important to offer student organization leaders opportunities to provide insights and suggestions of their own. Hence, in the NSSL, student organization officers were asked to indicate whether they would like additional assistance with an array of different group activities.

While student officers requested assistance with a number of different tasks, those at the top of their list were activities—recruiting new (59.5%) and diverse (40.5%) members, planning campus events (45%), and coordinating activities with on-campus (46.6%) and off campus (38.3%) groups—that would also help their organizations provide more robust civic and political socialization (see Table 28 in Appendix A).

Participating campuses also received verbatim responses to an open-ended question, allowing student officers to explain anything else their institution could do to help make organizations successful. Combined, the closed-ended and open-ended answers provided insight into ways to help student organizations and their executive officers undertake activities that the students themselves believe are important.

Student Officers' Trust in Others Political Interest, Anticipated Political Participation, and Political Efficacy; Preparing Students for Civic and Political Leadership

Finally, while the design of this particular research study cannot provide a direct correlation between all group members' levels of political interest, participation, and efficacy, it does allow for assessment of these attitudes and behaviors among student officers. The well-established connection between participation in civic life and long-term adult civic and political engagement suggests that those serving in executive positions in campus groups should have elevated levels of social trust and political efficacy, while anticipating higher levels of political participation in the future. Several questions are included in the NSSL to determine if such speculation about student leaders is accurate.

Given their likely involvement with their own group, and with other groups on campus, one would expect student leaders to have higher levels of generalized social trust in others. Trust in other citizens is a prerequisite for a stable, functional democracy (Putnam 2000). Without it, people are unlikely to respect those who disagree with them enough to engage in democratic, deliberative decision making.

They are also unlikely to be willing to enact (or to pay taxes to support) policies that provide benefits to those they deem untrustworthy and therefore undeserving (Rothstein, 2011; Uslaner, 2002). Thus, it is important for student officers, who are expected to step forward as civic and political leaders, to believe that other people can be trusted, at least most of the time, to contribute fairly to the collective endeavors undertaken by a democratic society. The finding that most student officers (89.4%) agree or strongly agree that most people try to be helpful and that most people (73.3%) can be trusted is reassuring (see Table 29 in Appendix A).

Similarly, if any students on campus are paying attention to political current events, it is likely to be student officers, who are more broadly connected to public life through their engagement in associational life. Table 30 in Appendix A indicates that well over a majority of student leaders are at least somewhat interested in state/local (78.1%), national (83.9%), and international politics (77.6%). Yet, it is problematic that students are least likely to report a strong interest in state/local politics when their organizations are, according to their own responses, capable of achieving the most influence. It is also disconcerting that over 20% of student leaders are completely disinterested in state/local and international politics, while 16% are equally disinterested in national politics. Given this pattern, campuses may need to do more to help students to recognize the way their organizational endeavors are affected by policy outcomes at the campus, local, state, national, and/or global levels. If students, especially student officers, are not making this connection, it seems unlikely that campus civil society is living up to its potential to provide robust political socialization.

Another series of questions in the NSSL were posed in order to measure student officers' levels of internal, external, and collective political efficacy, as even interested students who lack these types of efficacy are unlikely to undertake efforts to influence political decisions. In the aggregate, student officers had fairly high levels of internal and political efficacy (see Table 31 in Appendix A), with more than half strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with statements claiming that government is too complicated to understand (57.2%) or that it would be difficult to make a real difference in politics (61.4%), and strongly agreeing or agreeing with the claim that they could do as good of a job in public office as others (61.2%). As one might anticipate, these student leaders had even higher levels of collective efficacy, with 94% strongly agreeing or agreeing that working with other citizens is the best way to get things done; that dramatic change can happen when people

band together and demand it (88.8%); that politicians respond to citizens' demands for change (82%); and that most people are willing to work together toward a common goal (78.4%). Notably, support for collective efficacy dropped back down to 55% when student officers were asked whether they knew how to work with others to change public policies—suggesting that student leaders' faith in collective action should be bolstered with more specific training on how the public policy process works.

Student officers were also asked to estimate their likelihood of participating in common political acts in the future. Their anticipated future behavior is summarized in Table 32 in Appendix A. Aside from anticipated voting in national elections, at 80.2%, student officers were most likely to report being more or very likely to participate in civic acts, such as working with others at the community level (71.8%) or volunteering (70.8%), than they were to anticipate more explicitly political forms of political participation such as persuading others to vote for a preferred candidate (34.2%), attending a rally (28.6%), contacting an elected official (24.7%), or working for a political candidate or party (18.3%). Given the ease of doing so, it is not surprising that student officers were somewhat more likely (49.7%) to anticipate signing a petition about a political issue. While these officers' commitment to civic voluntarism is admirable, many have not made the connection between the skills they are learning as student leaders to the ability to influence political outcomes on issues that they prioritize. Therefore, staff and faculty may need to do more to help students recognize the connection between their organizational activities and the ability to wield influence in the political process.

Discussion: Building on the Success of Student Life

The 2014-2015 NSSL reveals that participation in student life already provides many students with important learning experiences that bolster their civic and political skills. Even if they do not always recognize the ways these experiences prepare them to wield more explicit political influence, many student officers not only gain the ability to do so (if and when they decide that they want to), but also have fairly high levels of trust in others, political interest, and political efficacy.

These learning experiences can be even further improved by recognizing the preeminent role civic voluntarism has played in providing political socialization to generations of Americans, and by paying attention to the types of organizational structures, membership composition, and activities that have opened “pathways to

democratic citizenship” (Skocpol, 2003, p. 98) in our past. The most beneficial voluntary associations in America’s history attracted diverse members, promoted their adoption of civic identities, required them to practice democratic decision-making procedures, and channeled their energy into common endeavors with tangible outcomes (Skocpol, 2003). Notably, the NSSL identifies room for improvement in each of these aspects of student life. Student affairs staff and faculty mentors should encourage student groups to build their civic muscles by undertaking more relevant activities and by practicing democratic decision making. Staff and faculty should also pay careful attention to the composition of student officers, as well as that of the groups they lead, to ensure diversity goals are adequately addressed and should promote interaction among groups with diverse membership to cultivate bridging social capital and broad trust in others. Fortunately, the provision of additional training, workshops, and mentoring to promote these desired outcomes should be welcome, as these are precisely the same issues that student leaders prioritized in their requests for assistance.

Conclusion: Continuing Assessment of Civic Learning and Political Socialization in Student Life

The in-depth account of the NSSL, along with the accompanying tables in Appendix A, are intended to relay the type of assessment data available to interested administrators and faculty members in future waves of the survey. The authors hope that this descriptive approach provides a catalyst for assessing whether the student groups that comprise the campus version of civil society are promoting the civic and political engagement goals embedded in college and university mission statements and that it will help student affairs staff, in partnership with faculty and administrators, to identify and promote best practices for democratic engagement whenever possible.

Final Note

To learn more about the CISR, see Appendix B, or visit the website at www.tinyURL.com/JoinSotl. Joining requires users to provide contact information as well as descriptive information about one’s institution, academic unit or department, and interests. Those who take teaching, learning, and assessment seriously and seek like-minded colleagues, whether they work at liberal arts colleges, regional comprehensive universities, community colleges, or research universities, are all eligible to join.

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Appendix A¹

Tables

Table 1
Student Officers' Class Status

	Percentage
Freshman	1.1
Sophomore	10.3
Junior	25.0
Senior	50.2
Graduate	13.1

Note. N = 2,131 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 2
Student Officers' Gender

	Percentage
Male	38.1
Female	61.6
Other	0.4

Note. N = 2,177 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 3
Student Officers' Age

	Percentage
Traditional (18-24)	84.6
Non-Traditional (Over 24)	15.4

Note. N = 2,193. The average age of student officers in the national sample was 22.4 and ranged from a low of 18 to a high of 59. | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

¹ The varying numbers of respondents reported in these tables reflects missing data from unanswered questions. While the overall response rate was N = 2,193, some respondents failed to answer every item included in the on-line questionnaire.

Table 4

Student Officers with International Status

	Percentage
American	93.1
International	6.9

Note. N = 216 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 5

Student Officers' Racial/Ethnic Identity

	Percentage
White/Non-Hispanic	70.2
Black/African American	7.0
Hispanic or Latino	7.1
Asian or Asian American	9.6
Native American	0.3
Pacific Islander	0.3
Multi-Racial or Ethnic	3.4
Other	2.0

Note. N = 2,156 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 6
Organizations' Purpose

	Percentage
Honors Society (e.g., Pi Sigma Alpha)	4.7
Academic (ex: Spanish Club, Sociology Club)	15.2
Residence Halls Council (e.g., groups that set policies in residence halls)	1.0
Intramural Sports (e.g., Soccer Club, Intramural Basketball)	4.1
Varsity Sports (e.g., university or college athletic teams)	1.2
Greek Fraternity or Sorority (e.g., Delta Delta Delta, Sigma Tau)	8.3
Cultural/Ethnic (e.g., Black Student Union)	7.0
GLBTQ (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliance)	1.0
Religious/Spiritual (e.g., Campus Bible Fellowship, Muslim Student Association, Hillel)	5.7
Service (e.g., Alternative Spring Breaks, Habitat for Humanity)	8.3
Professional (e.g., Public Relations Student Society of America)	13.0
Political (e.g., College Democrats, Young Republicans, Young Americans for Freedom)	2.9
Special Interest (e.g., Students for Life, Environmental Club)	12.8
Other	14.7

Note. N = 2,051. | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 7
Organizations' Most Important Function

	Percentage
Help student to be successful in class	13.1
Help students prepare for a career or internship	26.6
Provide a religious or spiritual community	6.3
Sponsor social activities (dances, movies, etc.)	10.7
Provide opportunities to play a sport	7.2
Encourage volunteering in the community	12.6
Encourage political participation	2.2
Celebrate a common heritage of ethnic identity	6.3
Bring attention to an important issue in society	15.0

Note. N = 1,629 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 8
Organizations' Intended Student Members

	Percentage
All Students	72.9
Male Students	4.8
Female Students	6.8
GLBTQ Students	0.8
Students who identify with a specific racial, ethnic, or cultural group	3.9
Other	10.9

Note. N = 2,057 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 9
SGA Participation

	Percentage
Yes	20.5
No	79.5

Note. N = 2,052 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 10
Number of Executive Positions and Annual Turnover Rate

Position	Groups with Position (N = 1,853)	Groups with Annual Turnover (N ranges from 1,801 to 582)
1	97.8	87.0
2	95.0	90.0
3	90.6	91.9
4	81.0	93.5
5	59.1	95.0
6	42.5	96.3

Table 11
Organizations with Federated Structures

	Percentage
Affiliated with a State Organization	3.0
Affiliated with a National Organization	26.7
Affiliated with Both	9.2
Not linked to a State/National Organization	61.1

Note. N = 1,845 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 12
Students Coordinating Activities with State Chapters

	Percentage
A Few Times a Semester	37.9
Once a Semester	23.0
Once a Year	18.7
Less than Once a Year	20.4

Note. N = 235 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 13
Students Coordinating Activities with National Chapters

	Percentage
A Few Times a Semester	27.3
Once a Semester	19.4
Once a Year	28.8
Less than Once a Year	24.5

Note. N = 670 | Columns may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

Table 14
Delegate Activities at State and National Conventions

	Percentage	N
Delegates help to develop policy for the entire organization	54.4	447
Delegates participate in deliberation at convention meetings	65.5	446
Delegates use parliamentary procedure at convention meetings	51.5	447
Delegates have the opportunity to vote on policy positions at convention meetings	57.8	446

Table 15
Frequency of Organizational Activities

	Less than 1X/ Year or Never	1X/ Year	1X/ Semester	2X/ Semester	1X/ Month	2X/ Month	1/Week or More	N
Held a meeting open to all members	3.7	1.8	5.3	7.5	18.5	22.4	40.8	1738
Required the membership to cast a vote	23.8	29.2	17.7	8.0	7.6	7.2	6.5	1731
Held a meeting of the executive board	10.0	3.3	7.7	8.6	18.9	18.6	32.9	1724
Assigned important tasks to a committee or subcommittee	17.7	4.5	10.5	9.2	18.1	19.6	20.3	1717
Sponsored or co-sponsored an educational event or program	21.8	9.1	23.7	17.9	17.6	6.9	2.9	1718
Sponsored or co-sponsored a social activity	35.7	9.2	20.1	14.6	12.3	5.5	2.7	1724
Sponsored or co-sponsored a fundraising event for charity	41.7	13.6	21.7	11.1	7.6	2.9	1.3	1715
Sponsored or co-sponsored a fundraising event for the group	38.2	13.1	23.8	12.9	7.6	3.4	1.0	1719

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Held a ceremonial ritual or event	56.1	18.9	13.7	6.1	3.4	1.1	0.7	1728
Gave speeches that explain the group's values and priorities	23.9	17.7	28.1	12.2	9.3	4.7	4.0	1727
Distributed materials that explain the group's values and priorities	23.6	17.3	28.8	13.7	8.2	5.0	3.4	1727

Table 16
Frequency of Democratic Decision-Making Practices

	Less than 1X/ Year or Never	1X/ Year	1X/ Semester	2X/ Semester	1X/ Month	2X/ Month	1/Week or More	N
Referring to constitution or by-laws to guide decision-making	31.3	19.5	18.3	8.2	7.4	7.0	8.3	1705
Engaging the full membership in deliberations	19.0	12.2	15.8	9.0	14.7	13.4	15.8	1699
Relying on the group's executive board	8.7	3.7	7.5	6.0	15.6	17.8	40.9	1690
Using formal rules to guide discussions	64.6	4.9	5.5	3.2	5.9	5.4	10.6	1685
Negotiating compromise among members who disagree	30.7	7.8	11.3	8.7	14.1	12.5	14.9	1698
Relying on a faculty advisor	28.2	9.6	14.2	10.2	15.0	11.4	11.5	1703

Table 17
Groups Influencing Policies

	A Few Times/ Semester	1X/ Semester	1X/ Year	Less than 1X/ Year	N
On your campus	16.2	14.7	14.8	54.3	1,552
In your town or community	5.2	11.1	11.6	72.0	1,545
In your state or across the country	4.0	7.1	7.7	81.2	1,540
In more than one country or across the globe	3.0	3.4	4.5	89.0	1,520

Table 18
Groups Undertaking Effective Volunteerism

	A Few Times/ Semester	1X/ Semester	1X/ Year	Less than 1X/ Year	N
On your campus	39.3	23.1	13.9	23.7	1,553
In your town or community	32.6	24.5	14.6	28.3	1,549
In your state or across the country	9.3	12.2	13.2	65.4	1,545
In more than one country or across the globe	3.8	4.2	8.2	83.8	1,540

Table 19
Groups Coordinating Activities with Other Groups

	A Few Times/ Semester	1X/ Semester	1X/ Year	Less than 1X/ Year	N
On your campus	39.7	27.6	16.7	16.0	1,477
In your town or community	21.9	23.4	16.3	38.4	1,467
In your state or across the country	7.8	12.5	12.6	67.1	1,470
In more than one country or across the globe	2.6	3.6	6.4	87.4	1,448

Table 20
Groups Influencing Others' Social Values and Life-Style Choices

	A Few Times/ Semester	1X/ Semester	1X/ Year	Less than 1X/ Year	N
On your campus	31.3	15.1	9.5	44.0	1,474
In your town or community	15.8	13.5	8.4	62.4	1,470
In your state or across the country	7.6	6.3	7.7	78.5	1,470
In more than one country or across the globe	3.8	2.9	4.3	89.0	1,468

Table 21
Indicators of Bonding Social Capital

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
Members have a tight bond with one another.	1.4	14.5	52.0	29.7	1,653
Members feel obligated to help one another.	2.1	13.8	57.6	26.5	1,650
Members trust each other a lot more than they do others.	3.5	28.9	48.7	18.8	1,648
Members almost always agree with each other about important issues.	4.1	32.7	52.7	10.5	1,650
Members share important core values.	1.3	6.3	60.7	31.7	1,649

Table 22
Indicators of Bridging Social Capital

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
Members regularly interact with other student groups.	33.8	14.5	52.0	29.7	1,653
Members regularly interact with community groups off campus.	6.7	33.1	46.3	13.9	1,645
Members feel obligated to address broad social or political issues.	11.1	38.2	35.3	15.5	1,646
Members share a respect for differing views within the group.	0.8	2.9	54.5	41.8	1,648

Table 23
Student Officers' Estimated Levels of Diversity in Group Composition

	Pretty Much the Same	Mixed	Very Different	N
Academic Major	33.6	41.6	24.7	1,645
Race/Ethnicity	31.2	55.7	13.1	1,645
Gender	26.7	63.7	9.6	1,645
Family's Income	6.1	74.4	19.5	1,628
Religious Affiliation	14.5	67.4	18.1	1,622
Political Party or Ideology	13.3	70.7	16.0	1,627

Table 24
Student Officers Desiring "Greater Mix" of Diversity

	Percentage	N
Academic Major	38.7	1,655
Race/Ethnicity	51.7	1,655
Gender	40.7	1,655
Family's Income	17.2	1,655
Religious Affiliation	16.7	1,655
Political Party or Ideology	17.5	1,655

Table 25
Student Officers Claiming to Have at Least One Member from Each Ethnic Group

	Percentage	N
White/Non-Hispanic	93.3	1,602
Hispanic	60.6	1,568
Black or African American	63.7	1,571
Asian or Asian American	60.1	1,577
Native American	13.2	1,525
Pacific Islander	12.7	1,525
Middle Eastern	31.8	1,521
Multi-Racial or Ethnic	54.5	1,541

Table 26
Student Officers Claiming to Have at Least One Member from Each Economic Class

	Percentage	N
Disadvantaged	49.0	1,598
Middle Class	85.1	1,609
Wealthy	64.7	1,602

Table 27
Formal Promotion of Diversity within Organizations

	Percent age	N
A statement on diversity is included in our by-laws or constitution.	42.1	1,497
Members are strongly encouraged or required to interact with diverse others.	58.0	1,490
Members with diverse backgrounds are explicitly recruited.	18.0	1,490
Members are strongly encouraged or required to attend diversity training or workshops.	21.8	1,493
Members are strongly encouraged or required to attend diversity events and programs.	31.7	1,483

Table 28
Student Officers' Requests for Assistance

	Percentage	N
Giving speeches	21.0	1,474
Running executive board meetings	20.5	1,475
Running meetings of the full membership	24.7	1,475
Using parliamentary procedure	12.5	1,475
Helping members to resolve conflicts	17.8	1,475
Seeking help from a faculty adviser/mentor	20.3	1,475
Recruiting new members	59.5	1,475
Attracting members from diverse backgrounds	40.5	1,475
Planning an event on campus	45.0	1,474
Coordinating activities with other campus groups	46.6	1,474
Coordinating activities with groups off campus	38.3	1,474

Table 29
Student Officers' Trust in Others

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
Thinking about human nature in general, most people can be trusted.	2.4	24.3	63.8	9.5	1,508
Most people will take advantage of you if given the chance.	5.7	62.3	28.2	3.8	1,507
Most people try to be helpful when they can.	0.5	10.1	72.4	17.0	1,509

Table 30
Student Officers' Political Interest

	Not at All Interested	Somewhat Interested	Strongly Interested	N
State and Local Politics	22.0	54.9	23.2	1,516
National Politics	16.1	48.2	35.7	1,514
International Politics	22.3	52.1	25.5	1,515

Table 31
Student Officers' Levels of Political Efficacy

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
<i>Internal Efficacy</i>					
People like me don't have a say about what government does.	21.9	52.8	21.5	3.8	1,435
Sometimes politics and government can seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what is going on.	20.9	36.3	37.2	5.7	1,428
I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.	8.5	30.2	45.5	15.7	1,432
<i>External Efficacy</i>					
Public officers don't care much what people like me think.	7.8	51.0	34.8	6.4	1,428
It would be difficult for someone like me to make a real difference in politics or government.	12.4	49.0	32.6	6.0	1,430
<i>Collective Efficacy</i>					
Politicians respond to citizens if enough people demand change.	3.0	14.9	60.8	21.2	1,427
Most people are willing to work together toward a common goal.	2.4	19.1	66.0	12.4	1,430
If you want to get things done as a citizen, working with others is the best way.	0.8	5.3	56.2	37.8	1,428
Dramatic change can occur in this country if people band together and demand it.	1.1	10.0	54.1	34.7	1,424

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I know how to work with others to change public policies.	6.1	38.6	44.3	11.0	1,420
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Table 32
Student Officers' Likelihood of Participating in Political Acts

	Not at All Likely	Somewhat Likely	More Likely	Very Likely	N
Work with others to solve community problems	4.0	24.2	35.3	36.5	1,489
Volunteer regularly for civic organizations	6.4	22.8	33.6	37.2	1,484
Vote in national elections	7.4	12.4	19.1	61.1	1,482
Vote in local elections	10.2	18.3	23.9	47.5	1,485
Persuade others to vote for a candidate	38.0	27.8	16.1	18.1	1,484
Work for or donate money to a candidate or party	58.7	23.0	9.9	8.4	1,481
Contact an elected official	46.1	29.2	13.1	11.6	1,485
Attend a political rally or protest	45.6	25.7	15.1	13.5	1,484
Sign a petition about a political issue	16.9	33.5	26.5	23.2	1,485

Appendix B

A New Assessment Community: The Consortium for Inter-Campus SoTL Research (CISR)

CISR was launched to facilitate research and assessment projects requiring collaborative, cross-campus data collection to assess the effectiveness of classroom pedagogy and campus-wide civic engagement initiatives. The co-authors worked to establish CISR because they both believe that more systematic, multi-campus data collection will help to identify the effective teaching practices and programming efforts that generalize beyond a single campus setting. Many of the teacher-scholars who are most interested in conducting SoTL research do not have the time or the resources to coordinate multi-campus efforts—which not only prevents large-N surveys from being undertaken, but also limits the selection of cases in qualitative work and subjects in experimental designs.

CISR's structure is intended to ease these constraints on multi-campus research and assessment projects by building a network of academics and administrators interested in helping to implement collaborative research. When members join CISR, they receive updates about upcoming peer-reviewed, advisory board-approved projects, with the option of participating in data collection. Those who opt in and facilitate a particular project will at minimum receive a summary report specific to their own campus, along with broader national trends that can be used as a point of comparison in internal assessment. Whenever possible, principle investigators are encouraged to share raw campus-level data for use in participating members' own scholarly or administrative work. In some cases, a principle investigator may seek co-authors and agree to provide full access to the database produced by a project. CISR members can also respond to calls for proposals and submit an original project for review by the advisory board, which will give extra consideration to members who have participated in previous projects.

The consortium, which currently has over 200 member campuses, is intended to provide those who join with access to more students, classes, and campuses—which should not only improve civic engagement assessment projects, but also provide improved SoTL findings worthy of publication. One of CISR's primary goals is to make it easier for teacher-scholars at colleges with heavy teaching loads to participate in cutting-edge SoTL research. In addition to recruiting participating campuses for member-initiated research projects, CISR will continue to coordinate future waves of the NSSL.

Author Biographies



J. Cherie Strachan received her doctorate in political science from the State University of New York at Albany in 2000. She is currently Director of Student and Civic Engagement for the College of Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Professor of Political Science at Central Michigan University. She's the author of *High-Tech Grassroots: The Professionalization of Local Elections*. Her recent publications focus on the role of civility in a democratic society, as well as on college-level civic education interventions intended to enhance students' civic skills and identities. Her applied research, which focuses on facilitating student-led deliberative discussions sessions and on enhancing campus civil society, has resulted in on-going work with the Kettering Foundation. She is also the co-founder of the Consortium for Inter-Campus SoTL Research (CISR), which facilitates cross-campus data collection for campus-wide civic engagement initiatives and political science pedagogy research. She can be reached at stracljc@cmich.edu.



Elizabeth Bennion is a Professor of Political Science and Director of the American Democracy Project at Indiana University South Bend. She teaches American politics, with an emphasis on political behavior. Bennion is the founding director of IUSB's American Democracy Project and host of the live weekly television program *Politically Speaking* where she moderates political discussions, public issue forums, and candidate debates for local, state, and national candidates. She has won numerous awards for her teaching and service, including local, state and national civic education awards. She has published widely in academic books, journals and newsletters, including *Indiana Journal of Political Science*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, and *Journal of Political Science Education*. Dr. Bennion is co-founder (with J. Cherie Strachan) of the Intercampus Consortium for SoTL Research. Her specialty is large, multi-campus surveys and field experiments that test the effectiveness of various interventions designed to increase students' civic and political engagement. Professor Bennion is currently working on a co-edited book on teaching civic engagement across the disciplines (a follow-up to *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen*). She lives in South Bend with her husband and four children.