

# Learning to Vote: Informing Political Participation Among College Students

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## Abstract

To inform universities' capacity to encourage student political participation, we examine associations between four civic influences – civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning – and youth participation during the 2008 presidential election. These four influences were selected because they are commonly integrated into higher education environments. Using an original survey we employ a broad definition of political behavior to explore ways college students express themselves politically and to examine potential influences on their participation. We hypothesize that students exposed to civic influences are more likely to vote and engage in other participatory activities than those who lack such exposure. Findings reveal that educationally-based civic influences that specifically address political content are more strongly associated with political behavior than is service-based activity. This supports an on-going reform discourse that targets civic education as a promising avenue for increasing youth participation in American elections and suggests a key role that universities can play during election years.

Decades of research have shown that young people are consistently less likely to vote – or to engage in any of the other civic or political behaviors that often precede voting – than are other age cohorts in American politics (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Wattenberg, 2008). While this remains true, youth participation in presidential elections in the last three elections has exceeded participation in 1996 and 2000 (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE, 2008; CIRCLE, 2013]). Higher education institutions can implement strategies to continue to advance growth in youth political participation.

In fact, higher education institutions play a critical role. College-educated youth participate more actively than counterparts who lack a college education. For example, 55–62% of college-educated youth voted in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, while only 28–36% of non-college-educated youth did so (CIRCLE, 2013). Yet, there is still substantial room to increase engagement even among youth attending college. To expand participation, reform efforts should influence youth political knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Berinsky, 2005; Hanmer, 2009). Higher education institutions have not always prioritized undergraduate political learning (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007); however, educationally based civic influences that are rooted in civic education and volunteer service may, in fact, further increase political engagement among

college students (Flanagan, 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Wattenberg, 2008; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006).

To inform future efforts to increase youth participation in politics, we systematically examine the extent to which exposure to a variety of civic influences in a higher education setting is associated with an increased likelihood of engagement in political activity among college students. Using an original survey, we examine multiple forms of election year political participation among undergraduate students at a private, mid-western research university. Civic education in higher education settings can take a variety of forms, including classroom-based civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussions about politics and current events, participation in community service, and academic-based service learning in which coursework is paired with community service. We investigate the extent to which these four forms of civic education are associated with undergraduate student political participation. Prior research has not examined the relationships of each form of civic education with distinct avenues for political behavior.

## Higher Education-Based Civic Influences

Research consistently finds that education is directly associated with youth political participation (CIRCLE, 2010; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). As young people advance in education beyond

high school, they increase political interest and community engagement through volunteer activity (Finlay & Flanagan, 2009). Policy makers, educators, and researchers have highlighted the important role that higher education institutions can play in encouraging civic engagement (e.g., Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta, 2006; Callan, 2004; Colby et al., 2007; Galston, 2001; McBride, 2008). Educationally-based civic influences, including civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning, are key ways that youth in a higher education setting may learn to become more active and politically engaged citizens (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Finlay & Flanagan, 2009; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Specifically, courses and co-curricular activities that seek to promote “responsible political engagement” have been linked with increases in political participation among students with no prior political interest (Colby et al., 2007, p. 8).

Civic instruction refers to courses through which students gain knowledge about government and processes of influencing government. There is, however, substantial disagreement about the extent to which classroom-based civic instruction affects political interest and the likelihood of political activity (e.g., Galston, 2007; Niemi & Junn, 1998). Deliberative course-based discussion refers to direct student engagement in thoughtful discussions around political and current events. Such discussions involve “citizens voicing rational reasons for their preferences, listening to one another, exchanging information and thereby moving towards decision making on the contentious issues facing society” takes place (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002, p. 23). Courses across disciplines can enable political deliberation if instructors foster open inquiry into a wide array of issues (McMillan & Harriger, 2002). Through deliberative discussion, students learn to understand and tolerate diverse opinions, ultimately reexamining their notions of citizenship and engaging in their communities (Callan, 2004; McMillan & Harriger, 2002). Compared with counterparts who lack such an experience, students who experience classroom-based deliberative discussion are more likely to exhibit political interest, whether through attention to the news or sharing political opinions in conversation, and to report intent to engage in civic activity (Campbell, 2005; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006; Niemi & Junn, 1998).

In terms of service-oriented civic influences, community service typically is offered outside of the classroom and is not directly linked to

classroom content. In this way, it differs from the three other civic influences discussed above. Volunteer opportunities may be arranged formally by university staff or student organizations, but also may occur informally with other students. For example, students can participate in an alternative spring break experience or regular sorority-sponsored visits to the local Ronald McDonald House. Community service is central to the construction of youth’s civic and moral identity. It increases students’ ties to their communities and is expected to have long-term impacts on their political behavior (Yates & Youniss, 1998). However, students are most likely to gain civic benefit from service projects that they find to be meaningful (Galston, 2001; Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003).

Service learning tends to be based in the classroom. It features structured volunteer service that is linked to educational objectives and systematic reflection on the service experience. Service learning can enable students to transfer knowledge and experiences between the classroom and a real-world setting. Through it, students can develop habits of participating in community life. Compared to their non-involved counterparts, college students involved in long-term service learning exhibit greater participation in such civic activities as raising awareness about social and political issues via the Internet, solving community problems, and engaging in consumer political activity (Keen & Hall, 2008, 2009). A longitudinal collegiate service learning study indicates that continued community engagement is a key outcome; rates of post-college volunteering are more than twice the national average (Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker, & Wells, 2008). It should be noted that youth volunteerism has been linked to a “substitution effect,” whereby students opt for future volunteer service in lieu of political engagement (Walker, 2000). The concern that service activities might replace political activity is illustrated by research findings that 94% of 15–24 year-olds identify helping others as the most important civic responsibility (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999).

### **Defining Political Behavior**

Our definition of political behavior captures a variety of ways in which young adults engage politically (Beaumont et al., 2006; Verba et al., 1995; Zukin et al., 2006). Existing research is limited because it neglects the diverse forms of active political participation that American youth engage in beyond voting. A generational shift in political

inclinations may be occurring; this shift may be due to growing impacts of globalization and social media innovations (Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009), or to an evolving desire to influence policymakers more directly than in the past (Dalton, 2008). Zukin et al. (2006) note a growing importance of expressive political behaviors among youth, distinguishing between traditional electoral behaviors and non-electoral “political voice” behaviors, which involve expression of political opinions in a variety of ways such as signing petitions, protesting, or communicating one’s views through traditional or social media venues. For today’s young people, a more expressive, “self-actualizing” politics – one incorporating political consumerism, social activism and volunteering – may take precedence over voting (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 106). While consumer politics is often measured (as in this study) in terms of intentional purchasing decisions vis-à-vis a company, it is important to note that students may engage in political consumerism in relation to an institution of higher education. For example, students may challenge economic decisions made by their administration that run counter to either the students’ values or the values that they believe the college or university purports to reflect. Students concerned about climate change at Washington University in St. Louis, Stanford, Harvard and at least 300 other colleges and universities in the U.S. have engaged in petitions, student body referenda, marches, and protests to try to persuade their schools to divest from coal mining and/or oil companies (Chappell, 2014; Shogren, 2013). Encouraging expressive forms of engagement can present an opportunity for increasing youth political participation in the years ahead.

In the literature that examines relationships between civic influences in higher education and youth participation, measures of participation tend to vary based on the influence under study. Service learning and community service research prioritizes the forms of engagement that Bennett et al. (2009) termed as “self-actualizing”; namely, volunteering, working with others to help one’s community, and participating in consumer politics (p. 106). Studies on civic instruction and deliberative discussion, however, typically measure effects on traditional political behaviors, such as voting.

We examine how each of these four structured civic influences – civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning – are linked with a broad set of student political behaviors. In accordance with

prior research that establishes a “substitution effect” (e.g., Walker, 2000), we expect influences that specifically address political content – civic instruction and deliberative discussion – to be strongly associated with traditional behaviors (e.g., voting and participation in campaign activities) and service-based civic influences to be strongly associated with less-traditional behaviors (e.g., social activism and political consumerism). Furthermore, we seek to confirm a meaningful distinction between traditional electoral behaviors and expressive behaviors in this college student sample (Bennett et al., 2009; Zukin et al., 2006).

## **Research Design and Methods**

The authors conducted a two-part panel survey of students at a private, mid-western research university. The survey, an online instrument created specifically for this study, asked about students’ political participation and exposure to four education-based civic influences during the 2008 presidential election. The survey was implemented through StudentVoice, an online survey tool regularly used by student organizations and the administration at the university. At two time points (Time 1, Time 2), an invitation to participate in the study and a link to the survey were sent to the students’ university email accounts. The Time 1 survey was administered in mid-September 2008, prior to the first presidential debate, and the Time 2 survey was administered just after Election Day in 2008 .

## **Sample Selection and Characteristics**

An online survey link was sent at Time 1 to 1,991 18–25 year old undergraduate students who are U.S. citizens, with African-American and Asian-American students oversampled (approximately 35% of the student body). At Time 1, 767 students completed the survey (39% response rate). The shorter Time 2 survey included questions focusing specifically on candidate preferences and political behavior between the first presidential debate and Election Day. Only students who completed the Time 1 survey received invitations to participate in the Time 2 follow-up, which was completed by 460 students (61% response rate). Retaining only students registered to vote yielded a final sample of N = 764 at Time 1 and N = 456 at Time 2. The voter registration requirement excluded a minimal number of respondents, as almost all respondents (95.5%) reported being registered to vote at Time 1, nearly two months prior to the general election.

The Time 1 and Time 2 samples share similar

demographics and political affiliation with the student body. At Time 1, more female students were in the sample (60%) than in the university's student body (approximately 50%), while the percentages were similar for white students (61% of Time 1 participants, 59% of the university's student body). Due to oversampling, the African-American (17%) and Asian-American (16%) percentages exceed their representation at the university (6% and 14%, respectively). Just 3.1% of the sample was Hispanic. As shown in Table 1, respondents were predominantly from suburban areas (76%), and the mean age was 19.56 ( $SD=1.23$ ). Compared to young voters and four-year college students across the U.S. (CIRCLE, 2008; Harvard Institute of Politics [IOP], 2008), substantially more students self-identified as Democrats (63%) and liberal (56% liberal or very liberal); fewer identified as Republicans (11%), Independents (27%), or conservative (7% conservative or very conservative).

At Time 2, almost all respondents reported voting in the 2008 general election (97%). In contrast, 90% of all registered voters in the U.S. voted in that election (File & Crissey, 2010). The percentage of students who voted for Barack Obama (84%) is much higher than the two-thirds of the vote he received from 18-29 year olds in the general population (CIRCLE, 2008). Not unexpectedly, likely due both to age constraints and patterns of lower midterm and primary election participation, substantially fewer sampled students reported voting in elections prior to 2008 (37%) or during the 2008 primary season (35%). The 2008 primary/caucus participation rate is equivalent to the rate identified for college students nationally by Harvard's Institute of Politics (2008), but it exceeds the 2008 rate of primary voting by young voters under 30 in all states except for New Hampshire (Kirby, Marcelo, Gillerman, & Linkins, 2008). Although our pre-2008 findings are limited, because a substantial portion of the sample was too young to vote, youth in the sample report voting prior to 2008 at a rate that is higher than the 25% of 18-29 year olds nationally who voted in the 2006 midterm elections (Marcelo, 2008).

## Measures

*Participation Measures.* Fourteen behavioral items were included in our analyses, and all use a 5-point Likert scale to capture responses. Each question, posed at Time 2, asked about participation "between the first 2008 Presidential debate and Election Day 2008." Table 1 lists the specific wording for each of these questions and for

others fielded in the two surveys. Results from a confirmatory factor analysis do not support the two-factor structure we initially expected to distinguish between behaviors that are electoral in nature and expressive "political voice" behaviors that occur outside the electoral realm (Zukin et al., 2006). However, we conducted a principal components analysis using a varimax rotation that yielded two new factors: political interest and political activism. These factors offer a meaningful distinction among possible participatory behaviors; they focus on the level of commitment required, rather than on the orientation of the behavior.

A composite political interest factor score ( $\alpha=.81$ ), created from six items in Table 1, measures expressions of attachment to, and desire to learn more about, a candidate(s). A composite political activism factor score ( $\alpha=.80$ ), created from seven items, measures committed political involvement on behalf of an issue or a candidate. One item, "attend any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate," is cross-loaded on both the political interest and political activism factors. Deletion was considered; however, this item was retained in both factors both because it shares conceptual meaning with both constructs and inclusion increases Chronbach's alpha for both factors. Two additional items were treated as separate dependent variables in multivariate analyses. One, community activism, examines working with a group to solve a community problem; for students, this may reflect work with a group of friends, through a campus or community-based religious organization, or with a campus student organization to address a community need. For example, students might work together to renovate a community center or to provide tax preparation assistance to residents of an impoverished community. The other, consumer politics, examines purchasing decisions made in light of a company's conduct or values. These two items reflect the "self-actualizing" lifestyle politics behavior that Bennett et al. (2009) describe.

Rates and average participation frequency for the four dependent variables – political interest, political activism, community activism, and consumer politics – are presented in Table 1. At least 50% of students engaged in political interest behaviors during the 2008 general election season. Among students represented in this category of political participation, the most common forms are paying attention to political campaigns and using the Internet to research a candidate's positions or speeches. Students engage in community

**Table 1.** Variable Descriptions and Statistics

<p><b>Age</b> In what month and year were you born? (N=721) Mean=19.56, SD=1.23</p> <p><b>Gender</b> What is your sex? (N=741) Male=40.1%, Female=59.9%</p> <p><b>Race</b> What racial or ethnic group best describes you? (N=741) Black=16.6%, Asian=15.5%, Hispanic=3.1%, White=60.7%, Other=4.0%</p> <p><b>Home</b> Where did you grow up mostly? (N=726) In a rural area=9.0%; in a suburban area=75.5%; in an urban area=15.6%</p> <p><b>Party Identification</b> Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else? (N=730) Republican=11.0%, Democrat=62.5%, Independent=26.6%</p> <p><b>Political Ideology</b> Generally speaking, how would you describe your political ideology? (N=722) Very conservative=.3%, Conservative=6.9%, Moderate=36.4%, Liberal=43.1%, Very liberal=13.3%</p> <p><b>Presidential Vote</b> Who did you vote for in the Presidential election? (N=440) Barack Obama=84.1%, John McCain=15.0%, Other=.9%</p> <p>Did you vote in the 2008 Presidential election? (N=456) Yes=96.7%, No=3.3%</p>	<p>Did you use the Internet to research a candidate's positions or speeches by a candidate? (N=450) Yes=94.7%, No= 5.3%</p> <p>Did you try to talk to people and explain why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates? (N=451) Yes=78.7, No=21.3%</p> <p>Did you attend any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate? (N=451) Yes=53.2%, No=46.8</p> <p><b>Political Activism</b> Did you contribute money to a candidate or party? (N=453) Yes=24.1%, No=75.9%</p> <p>Did you work or volunteer on a political campaign for a candidate or party? (N=450) Yes=22.9%, No=77.1%</p> <p>Did you express your views about politics on a website, blog, chatroom? (N=452) Yes=26.8%, No=73.2</p> <p>Did you contact a newspaper, radio, or TV talk show to express your opinion on an issue? (N=452) Yes=10.6%, No=89.4</p> <p>Did you participate in political activities such as protests, marches, or demonstrations? (N=452) Yes=27.4%, No=72.6%</p> <p>Did you contact or visit someone in the government who represents your community? (N=453) Yes=15.0%, No=85%</p> <p>Did you attend any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate? (N=451) Yes=53.2%, No=46.8</p>	<p>tion? N=452) Yes=39.4%, No =61.6%</p> <p><b>Course-Based Discussion</b> At a college or university, have you had discussions in any of your classes about the Presidential election? (N=445) Yes=71.2%, No=28.8%</p> <p><b>Service Learning</b> Have you participated in a service learning project or program? (N=690) Yes=40.1% No=59.9%</p> <p><b>Community Service</b> Have you ever participated in any community service or volunteer activity? (1=Never, 5=Very often) (N=748) Mean=3.74, SD=.89</p> <p><b>Parental Engagement</b> My parents encourage me to express my opinions about politics and current events even if they are different from their views. (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree) (N=706) Mean=3.94, SD=1.24</p> <p><b>Peer Engagement</b> My friends encourage me to express my opinions about politics and current events even if they are different from their views. (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree) (N=717) Mean=3.77, SD=1.11</p> <p><b>Personal Contact</b> In 2008, were you contacted by someone personally to work for or contribute money to a candidate, party, or any other organization that supports candidates? (N=442) Yes=60.6% No=39.4</p>
<p><b>Political Interest</b> Did you wear a campaign button or shirt, put a campaign sticker on your car, or place a sign in your window or in front of your residence? (N=452) Yes=54.2%, No=45.8%</p> <p>Did you friend or join a group related to a presidential candidate or political party on a social networking site? (N=451) Yes=49.9, No=40.1</p> <p>Did you pay attention to political campaigns? (N=448) Yes=99.3%, No=.07%</p>	<p><b>Community Activism</b> Did you work with a group to solve a problem in a community? (N=449) Yes=54.1%, No=45.9</p> <p><b>Consumer Politics</b> Did you make a purchasing decision based on the conduct or values of a company? (N=446) Yes=55.6%, No=44.4%</p> <p><b>Civic Instruction</b> At a college or university, have you taken a class on government, politics, or civic educa-</p>	<p><b>Election Behavior</b> Were you encouraged by anyone to vote in the 2008 Presidential election? (N=454) Yes=99.3% No=.7%</p> <p>Were you encouraged by anyone to vote for a specific candidate in the 2008 Presidential election? (N=451) Yes=95.1%, No=4.9%</p> <p>Not including the 2008 primary and general elections, have you ever voted in a local, state, or national election? (N=753) Yes=37.3%, No=62.7</p>

activism or consumer politics less frequently than they participate in many of the political interest behaviors, but more so than they participate in any of the political activism behaviors. With the exception of attending political events (cross-loaded onto the political interest factor as well), fewer than 30% of respondents participate in each political activism behavior, and the mean frequency is below 1.60 on a 5-point scale. Particularly low involvement is shown in results from two measures of activism: contacting media to express an opinion and contacting a representative in government.

*Civic Influences.* Our analysis includes measures of four education-based civic influences: civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning. A dichotomous civic instruction measure captures student enrollment in courses with an explicit civic purpose at Time 2, as indicated in Table 1. The single-item measure asked, "At a college or university, have you taken a class on government, politics, or civic education?" A dichotomous deliberative course-based discussion measure captures exposure to classroom-based discussions of current events, also at Time 2. This item specifically asked students, "At a college or university, have you had discussions in any of your classes about the Presidential election?"

At Time 1, a community service frequency measure asked, "Have you ever participated in any community service or volunteer activity? By volunteer activity, we mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay." This item was measured with a 5-point scale, possible response options range from "Never" to "Very Often". A dichotomous service learning measure included at Time 1 asked respondents, "Have you participated in a service learning project or program? By service learning, we mean volunteer activity in conjunction with your coursework or other academic studies."

*Control Variables.* Ten demographic and politically-oriented variables are included as controls in the analyses. Age, gender, and race each have been associated with youth participation (e.g., Lopez & Kirby, 2005; Marcelo, Lopez, & Kirby, 2007; Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1994; Taft, 2006; Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeld, 2007). Parental engagement and peer engagement may also help foster youth political knowledge, identity, and behavior (McDevitt, 2006; McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007). Direct mobilization may have a particularly salient influence on students' political participation (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Three dichotomous variables capture specific outreach to seek students' political participation. The personal

contact item asked respondents, "In 2008, were you contacted by someone personally to work for or contribute money to a candidate, party, or any other organization that supports candidates?" The 2008 encouragement variable asked respondents, "In 2008, were you encouraged by anyone to vote in the 2008 Presidential election?" The specific encouragement item asked respondents, "In 2008, were you encouraged by anyone to vote for a specific candidate in the 2008 Presidential election?"

Finally, the model includes a control for prior voting activity, as initial political activity may be linked with subsequent activity (e.g., Plutzer, 2002). A dichotomous measure of voting before 2008, asked, "Not including the 2008 primary and general elections, have you ever voted in a local, state, or national election?" It should be noted that this variable introduces some error into the analysis, as 25.5% of the sample was 18 years old at the time of the November 2008 election. A final dichotomous question measures voting in a 2008 primary election.

## Results

Separate multiple regression analyses (see Table 2) assessed the strength of each dependent variable's relationships with the four educationally-based civic influences. Control variables are entered into each regression model. Because of missing responses to integral variables, sample sizes across the four models range from  $N = 336$  to  $N = 344$ .

Regression results indicate that the political interest model explains 26% of the model variance ( $F(17, 318)=7.766, p=.000$ ). Two civic influences are associated with increased political interest frequency: civic instruction ( $B=0.355, p<.01$ ) and deliberative course-based discussion ( $B=0.296, p<.01$ ). Two other variables also are significantly associated with political interest frequency: parental engagement ( $B=.180, p<.001$ ) and personal contact mobilization ( $B=.600, p<.001$ ).

The political activism model explains 20% of the model variance ( $F(17, 323)=5.924, p=.000$ ). Two civic influences are associated with increased frequency of engagement in political activism: civic instruction ( $B=0.418, p<.001$ ) and deliberative course-based discussions ( $B=0.264, p<.05$ ). Additionally, when controlling for other variables in the model, student mobilization through personal contact ( $B=.462, p<.001$ ) and voting in a primary or caucus ( $B=.358, p<.01$ ) are associated with increased engagement in political activism.

The model for community activism explains just 9% of the model variance ( $F(17, 326)=2.883,$

**Table 2.** Associations Between Civic Influence and Political Behaviors

	Political Interests	Political Activism	Community Activism	Consumer Politics
N	336	341	344	342
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.256	.198	.085	.007
Model Fit	F(17,318)=7.766, p=.000	f(17,323)=5.924, p=.000	F(17,326)=2.883, p=.000	F917,324)=1.151, p=.304
Civic Instruction	B=.355**, $\beta$ =.170	B=.418***, $\beta$ =.198	B=-.011, $\beta$ =.004	B=.051, $\beta$ =.019
Deliberative Discussion	B=.296**, $\beta$ =.131	B=.264*, $\beta$ =.115	B=.043, $\beta$ =.015	B=.174, $\beta$ =.061
Service Learning	B=-.035, $\beta$ =-.017	B=.166, $\beta$ =.078	B=.061, $\beta$ =.023	B=.003, $\beta$ =.001
Community Service	B=.044, $\beta$ =.038	B=.095, $\beta$ =.082	B=.442***, $\beta$ =.304	B=.076, $\beta$ =.052
Parental Engagement	B=.180***, $\beta$ =.218	B=.050, $\beta$ =.060	B=-.032, $\beta$ =-.031	B=.047, $\beta$ =.045
Peer Engagement	B=.019, $\beta$ =.020	B=-.023, $\beta$ =-.023	B=.012, $\beta$ =.085	B=.063, $\beta$ =.052
Personal Contact	B=.600***, $\beta$ =.284	B=.462***, $\beta$ =.216	B=.208, $\beta$ =.078	B=.354, $\beta$ =.132
2008 Encouragement	B=.044, $\beta$ =.002	B=.275, $\beta$ =.014	B=-1.851, $\beta$ =-.077	B=-.058, $\beta$ =-.002
Specific Encouragement	B=.371, $\beta$ =.072	B=.013, $\beta$ =-.003	B=-.005, $\beta$ =-.001	B=-.159, $\beta$ =-.024
Vote Before 2008	B=.095, $\beta$ =.045	B=.085, $\beta$ =.040	B=-.022, $\beta$ =-.008	B=.083, $\beta$ =.031
Vote 2008 Primary	B=.188, $\beta$ =.090	B=.358**, $\beta$ =.169	B=.031, $\beta$ =.012	B=-.052, $\beta$ =-.020
Age	B=-.020, $\beta$ =-.024	B=-.060, $\beta$ =-.071	B=.052, $\beta$ =.050	B=-.025, $\beta$ =-.023
Gender (Female)	B=.089, $\beta$ =.042	B=-.001, $\beta$ =-.001	B=-.062, $\beta$ =-.023	B=.217, $\beta$ =.081
Race (Black)	B=.113, $\beta$ =.038	B=-.026, $\beta$ =-.009	B=.230, $\beta$ =.063	B=-.184, $\beta$ =-.050
Race (Asian)	B=-.027, $\beta$ =-.009	B=-.053, $\beta$ =-.018	B=-.050, $\beta$ =.014	B=-.309, $\beta$ =-.084
Race (Hispanic)	B=.106, $\beta$ =.016	B=.205, $\beta$ =.030	B=-.320, $\beta$ =-.035	B=.274, $\beta$ =.030
Race (Other)	B=-.088, $\beta$ =-.018	B=-.007, $\beta$ =-.001	B=.116, $\beta$ =.018	B=.051, $\beta$ =-.008

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

$p < .000$ ). Community service involvement is significantly associated with an increased frequency of engagement in community activism ( $B = 0.442$ ,  $p < .001$ ). No significant association is found between consumer politics and any of the four civic influences ( $F(17, 324) = 1.151$ ,  $p = .304$ ).

## Discussion

These results suggest potential avenues through which universities might encourage student political behavior, and they provide insight into how students behave politically. As discussed below, we find that three of the four educationally-based civic influences – civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussions, and community service – may be linked with college student civic involvement. It should be noted that the research design precludes identification of causal relationships. Civic-minded students may, in fact, be more likely than other students to seek out civic education opportunities. In fact, the level of political participation among students in this sample, a level higher than that among youth in the general population, suggests that the sample members may be more civically inclined than their counterparts in the general population.

### *Civic Influences*

Higher education institutions may be able to help shape student civic involvement through both classroom-based and extracurricular activity. Structured opportunities for civic instruction and deliberative course-based discussions may be particularly beneficial in efforts to strengthen the extent to which students pay attention to candidates' words and actions, actively demonstrate support for candidates, and engage in political activism. Classroom content that is explicitly political may elicit committed political action; however, such opportunities should not be limited to political science classes that may only serve a subset of a university's student population.

Although classroom-based civic influences are linked with political interest and activism, the influences do not appear to be associated with the frequency of community activism. Consistent with a hypothesized "substitution effect" (e.g., Walker, 2000), the results indicate that community service is linked with increased community participation. Integrating service opportunities on campus may positively affect students' civic behavior (Galston, 2001; Keen & Hall, 2008, 2009).

Our findings identify an additional avenue by which universities might facilitate student political

participation. Specifically, creating and supporting opportunities for personal contact, wherein campaign representatives or peers directly ask students to volunteer or contribute to a campaign, also may facilitate political interest and activism. This does not require a university to prioritize specific political candidates or parties, only that a university enable such contacts across the political spectrum. Although our study participants appear to be more civically engaged than the general college-age population (Harvard IOP, 2008), expanding the availability of these civic influences may facilitate participation among youth with little prior political experience (Colby et al., 2007). Future research can seek to reduce self-selection bias and target a less elite sample of students.

### *College Students' Political Behavior*

Consistent with Beaumont et al.'s (2006) argument that focusing on voting limits our understanding of the myriad ways in which young adults express themselves politically, we also examine students' participation in a broad range of political behaviors. Although prior research distinguishes traditional electorally-based behaviors from more expressive civic behaviors (Bennett et al., 2009; Zukin et al., 2006), our factor analysis suggests a stronger division along the extent of commitment that each behavior requires. Two solid factors emerge: behaviors that exhibit political interest and those that require a more sustained commitment to political involvement through activism. Substantial differences in how youth engage in these two categories of behavior suggest that the two groupings may provide a meaningful way to understand the diverse forms of modern youth political behavior.

This sample is highly engaged in political interest behaviors, proactively seeking out information necessary to make political decisions. Almost every student in this sample paid attention to the political campaigns taking place during fall 2008, and nearly the whole sample used the Internet to research candidates' positions or speeches. Once a student selects a candidate to support (most in this sample supported Barack Obama), he or she exhibits continued interest in supporting the candidate, persuading others to vote for the candidate, joining a social networking group, attending events on behalf of a candidate, and displaying campaign paraphernalia. Although campaigns specifically targeted youth for mobilization in the 2008 election, future research should examine whether political interest behaviors remain high among

youth during subsequent elections.

Political behaviors requiring a sustained or intense level of commitment were much rarer. Interestingly, while students are less likely to engage in community activism or consumer politics than to express political interest, they are more likely to engage in all three of these activity forms than to participate in political activism. Just over a quarter of this sample participated in political activism by engaging in group-based activities such as protests, marches, and demonstrations or by individually expressing political views on the Internet. Students infrequently contact media or a government representative to express opinions on specific policy or political issues (only 10-15% report doing so). Our findings indicate that similar civic influences – civic instruction, classroom-based deliberative discussion – as well as personal contact mobilization are associated with both political interest and political activism. This suggests while higher education institutions can facilitate political activism, factors external to students' educational environment may contribute to comparatively low rates of political activism. Findings from this particular study may in part reflect less focus on issue-oriented behaviors in the context of an election where individual characteristics of the presidential and vice presidential candidates (particularly Barack Obama and Sarah Palin) received substantial media and popular attention.

Increases in voting by youth in presidential elections (CIRCLE, 2013) suggest room for continued expansion of youth voting if higher education makes a commitment to support and encourage student participation. These data support the growing calls for higher education institutions to develop citizenship among students (Bok, 2006; Colby et al., 2007). Universities are well-positioned to reach this population and have the capacity to strengthen student orientations toward active citizenship. Our findings indicate that colleges and universities may be able to strengthen such orientations by integrating civic influences into curricular and extra-curricular offerings.

## Conclusion

Politically engaged youth are likely to continue political participation as adults (Flanagan, 2009; Plutzer, 2002; Wattenberg, 2008). Thus, increasing political engagement among college students may lay the groundwork for increases in the size of the pool of active adult citizens and may shape future trends in American political participation (Flanagan, 2009; Wattenberg, 2008). A concerted

effort to foster college student political engagement may facilitate continued growth in youth political involvement. Promoting a campus environment in which students are encouraged to take courses on government and politics – one in which deliberative discussion and service involvement are prioritized – may contribute to a more engaged citizenry. Furthermore, universities can facilitate and support student contact with campaigns and candidates across the political spectrum. Yet, since relationships vary among the civic influences and the political behaviors examined in this study, campus administrators and faculty should make conscious decisions about the types of civic behavior that their institution wants to promote, with an education that integrates a diverse set of influences offering the most potential for success in developing fully engaged citizens.

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