

MEMORANDUM

TO: Carol Geary Schneider & Debra Humphreys, AAC&U
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: December 22, 2011
RE: Key Findings From Recent Focus Groups On Increasing Support For Civic Learning In Higher Education

This report outlines key findings based on two focus groups that Hart Research conducted on behalf of AAC&U in Washington, DC. On December 6, 2011, Hart Research convened one session among Republican-leaning policy influencers (individuals who work in government, think tanks, trade associations, and advocacy groups, with a focus on a variety of policy issues and disciplines). A second group among Democratic-leaning policy influencers was held on December 9, 2011, among professionals representing a similar mix of policy positions in and around Capitol Hill.

These sessions were undertaken to understand thoughts and opinions surrounding the need to increase levels of civic knowledge and engagement in the United States today. The discussions explored the degree to which low levels of civic knowledge among Americans is a concern, and whether higher education can and should play a role in bolstering civic engagement. Examples of what civic learning in college may include and potential messages were tested in both sessions.

These two focus groups provide an important qualitative perspective on AAC&U's approach to enhancing civic and democratic learning opportunities in higher education. However, it is important to note that focus groups are not scientific studies, and the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of policy influencers of either political party.

Key Findings

1 There is collective agreement about the need to raise the level of civic knowledge and engagement in our country today.

- Policy influencers on both sides of the aisle agree that an educated and involved citizenry is key to a thriving democracy. For a democracy to work properly, citizens must have a working knowledge of the political system, its history, and their representation. An educated citizenry helps keep government accountable, particularly on the local level. Both groups agree that civic engagement stems from a working understanding of how our government operates and the history of our nation's founding.

"There is an importance to understanding the world we live in, where we've come from, and where we need to go." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

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“MODERATOR: But when it comes to thinking about increasing the level of civic knowledge and engagement, is there a belief that that is important to do or not important to do?”

“ Absolutely.”

“ Yes.”

“ Very important.” (Republican Policy Influencers)

“If they’re not informed and understand the right person to pick or the person that will carry their interests, then it is the citizens’ problem. That’s the whole point. That’s representative democracy.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“We’ve done a horrible job of civic education in this country...just simple nuts and bolts things people don’t even know...people don’t know how the government is set up or why it was set up the way it is.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

“People need to realize that...you vote for your school board or the school budget....And if you’re not engaged in that, you get the government you deserve.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

- The conversations around civic engagement differ slightly between the two audiences. Republican policy influencers tend to link engagement primarily to politics and government, and focus on a lack of civic knowledge and weak voter participation. Their Democratic counterparts focus on political participation, but they also more readily associate civic engagement with the broader community, noting that it means being involved in the community and giving back to the less fortunate.

“I don’t necessarily think of civic engagement as necessarily political. It can be, you know, just volunteering in your community to do a clean-up day.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

- In the Democratic group, the importance of bolstering our global consciousness also is raised. Some participants note that increasing civic knowledge can help Americans to better appreciate their government in a global context and enrich our understanding of global affairs and the United States’s place in them. Many see studying abroad in the realm of higher education as a vehicle for a sound civic education.

“Having a global context is vital in any time period but I think now more than ever given how dramatically things are changing and how reliant we are on outside dynamics of other countries and their economies. And it seems like other countries are realizing that more than we seem to be, especially with Africa, Brazil, and China and the rest of Asia.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“I think understanding what civic responsibility is...as well as the responsibilities of a citizen at home but also globally.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

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"I think one of the sad things has been that in terms of global issues, it's almost become for some a badge of honor not to have a passport, not to be traveling abroad other than for entertainment, but that there is an importance to understanding the world we live in where we've come from and where we need to go." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

- Both sides agree that a better civic education is important to developing critical-thinking skills and promoting a more productive dialogue between opposing parties. Policy influencers believe increasing the number of informed thinkers can help reduce the polarizing effects of politics and help promote compromise on tough issues.

"I think one of the skills that you hope to get across is the ability to at least understand where the other side of a debate is." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I think a responsible citizen should be able to realize there may be some things, another point of view, and that's part of that good citizenship to find out what the other side is and to have the kind of good judgment." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

- Facts about civic knowledge and engagement in America today underscore the importance of the issue. Few are surprised by the information, but react strongly to the need to address the problem. Facts that highlight holes in our approach to civics in the education system and emphasize low levels of civic engagement relative to other countries are particularly powerful:
 - *Half of states no longer require civics education for high school graduation.*
 - *The U.S. ranked 139th in voter participation of 172 world democracies in 2007.*
 - *College seniors scored only 54% correct answers on a test measuring civic knowledge.*
 - *In a survey of the U.S. population, only one-third of Americans could name all three branches of government; one-third couldn't name any.*

"It's horrible." / "It's pathetic." / "It's embarrassing." / "[It's] depressing." (Democratic Policy Influencers)

"It's not too surprising." / "I'm not surprised at all." / "It's depressing." (Republican Policy Influencers)

"It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that these ingredients don't add up to good politicians, that this pool of people voting or not voting is probably not going to produce an optimal situation." (Democratic Policy Influencers)

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"It's ridiculous. We live in the greatest country in the world, people fought and died for us to have these rights, and just taking them for granted....apparently the majority of America does. They don't know these basic things. It's just infuriating for me." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"It doesn't surprise me at all. I guess maybe I'm the closest to some of these demographics, age-wise, and I think you see just an overwhelming majority of people that don't get these things and don't care about them." (Republican Policy Influencer)

2 The term "civic responsibility" resonates with many who define being a good citizen as taking responsibility for staying informed and being actively involved.

- Taking responsibility is a strong mantra on both sides of the aisle. Participants agree that civic responsibility starts with individuals taking the time to educate themselves about the political process, their representation, and important issues, and going to the polls to exercise their rights as citizens.

"I would say civic responsibility is understanding the history and part of one's country and...to have an understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a citizen of this country, where we've come from, where we are, where we need to go." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"Civic responsibility to me is kind of the foundation of our democracy. And how it was structured and being informed and understanding one's self-interest and voting accordingly is kind of the linchpin for democracy to work." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"First off, you need to take responsibility for being informed. A lot of people, unless it affects them every single day, can be very closed off to the world around them. They don't watch the news, they don't pick up the newspaper, and that kind of inertia is dangerous because you have a misinformed electorate that ends up voting people into office, and we get what we have now." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I think we stopped teaching basic civics many years ago. And, to me, the basic civics course teaches that, in a vibrant, healthy democracy, citizens have responsibilities and they have to exercise those." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I really do believe that responsibility, in a more expansive way, is really at the heart of being the kind of citizen that you should be in a healthy, robust, vibrant, democratic society. And responsibility is being informed, exercising your rights, knowing who your member of Congress is, knowing how public policy-making impacts you every day of your life, whether you like it or not...I think responsibility is a network that weaves in lots of different directions. But if I have to distill it down to one word, I think it's exactly that, responsibility." (Republican Policy Influencer)

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- The term “civic responsibility” resonates especially well among those in the Republican-leaning group. While they do not reject the term “civic engagement,” one participant introduced the term early in the discussion and others in the group gravitate toward it. They focus on the responsibility of making informed choices because choices and actions (especially at the polls) have consequences for the country.
- Being a “good citizen” begins with being an informed participant in the political process, but, as one participant notes, “you don’t have to know how a car works to be a good driver.” Good citizens must be both knowledgeable and engaged, by being involved in the political process and the wider community.

“I wanted to get to the point of education, which is, you don’t need to know how a car works to be a good driver....My point being is that, you know, ultimately, how people view their neighbors, and their country, and their community is far more important to me than whether they can name who the Speaker of the House is.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

“I think the mechanics are much less important than, you know, instilling in people a sense of civic responsibility.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

3 Although there is little disagreement about the importance of increasing civic knowledge and engagement, some debate whether our nation is witnessing an unprecedented “civic recession.”

- Some question the accuracy of describing America as in the midst of a “civic recession,” due to low levels of civic knowledge and participation.

“I don’t know if I’d describe it that way...I think that it’s a time of tremendous economic stress, and it’s a time of polarization. So I think there’s a lot of disagreement. I don’t know that...people aren’t engaged. I think...there’s always a range of engagement...to a large extent, a lot of people are very engaged in...the political process, in what the country should do and shouldn’t do.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

- Policy influencers argue that civic knowledge and engagement today is largely on par with that of previous generations. Some point to nostalgia for the “Great Generation” as fueling ideas that engagement was greater in the past than today. They point out that civic engagement in America has grown as a result of overcoming long periods of disenfranchisement among certain populations.

“I don’t know because, one, my concern about sort of the nostalgia of the Great Generation. I think people sort of think of a time that might have been very different...Unless you can show me some evidence [of a civic recession], I’m very hesitant...But I’m open to it, but I do not, by any extent of the imagination, believe it’s been proved that we are in a civic recession.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

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"I would disagree for some of the same reasons, while being skeptical. I just think we had periods where you had a lot of the country disenfranchised in the past. We had periods where, I don't know that people were necessarily informed, but they were just more trusting...I'm not sure...that there was this period where everybody knew this stuff really well and was really engaged, as opposed to, I just trust whoever my block party leader says to vote for." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I just think this sense of, this sort of sentiment that people are sort of uninformed and not active is just, you always will have that in sort of that sense. But in a moment right now where you have populous movements on both the left and the right, there's very active engagement. You have people across the country who are sitting and occupying or hanging out and living in cities to protest. And on the right, you have a Tea Party movement that was, you know, extremely active. So, I mean, I think the engagement, again, is very, very high." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"The big point is, to counter that would be, it's never been terribly high. I mean, unless you went back to where it was only white males, property owners, I mean, the more you've expanded the franchise in history, the less percentage of people have voted, as a generality." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I found this book that my mother bought when she was in college. It was called, *It all Started with Columbus*. And it was some professor put together American history as told to him on the tests that he had given his students. So it was basically a whole collection of bloopers. But while it was interesting, this book was published in 1955. So, we may have just this trough of the low level of civic education and maybe nothing new." (Republican Policy Influencer)

- Others are more vocal about the distinct lack of civic engagement and knowledge among today's society, noting the low levels at which certain subgroups of the population (particularly today's younger generation) go to the polls. Others point to a "culture of ignorance" among youth, for whom being knowledgeable is seen as "uncool."

"But to build on that is, if you look at municipal elections that happen every year or state elections that are in a non-presidential cycle, the level of people voting in this country is 20% to 30%. And that's 70% of the electorate not voting." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I think there's an amorphous entity that helps, and I just don't know where to put the finger on it. But it's, which it may be, like pop culture or Hollywood, something like that. But, I go back to this sort of anti-intellectual, anti-knowledge pressure on kids is very strong. My kids are in middle school. You already see if they get an A on an exam, they're sort of looked down upon, whereas if they're playing on the basketball team, it's like, ooh, that's great." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

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- The term “civic deficit” is suggested in the group of Republican policy influencers and resonates. Many feel comfortable with the term to describe current levels of civic knowledge and engagement without drawing a strong line between the situation today and past history.

“The conversation has obviously highlighted, especially when you have two or more people in a room, that you need to define your terms very clearly, especially if it’s a contested term. But, from one perspective of this curriculum in public education, I would feel very comfortable with using the term civic deficit.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

4 Policy influencers believe institutions and individuals play a shared role in improving levels of civic knowledge and engagement, but these audiences look first and foremost at the K-12 education system as playing the key role.

- The K-12 education system is believed to play the primary role in increasing levels of civic knowledge, and many believe it is largely failing. There is broad recognition that civics should be taught from a young age, and students who graduate from high school must emerge with a basic understanding of how our government functions. Engagement begins with knowledge and understanding, and many believe K-12 schools are missing the mark. Also crucial to increasing levels of civic knowledge in the classroom is emphasizing its importance and relevancy—how government affects everyday lives.

“We’ve got to do something about the curriculum in education, so that it starts young to get kids involved, and so that they recognize young that it’s important. It’s just as important as learning how to balance a checkbook or whatever they used to teach us when we were young, that, you know, as an adult, you have to do these things, as important as it is to learn how to drive and get your license. You need to learn how to vote properly. So that’s the long term.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

“But this is an indictment of the educational system, right? I mean, it’s a complete indictment of the educational system, and as a parent, I’m not a parent, but as a parent I would assume my kid is getting this at school. I would just make that assumption. Now whether it sinks into the kid, that’s a different story, but it should be happening, and if it’s not happening, then there are people you can hold accountable right now.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“Too often people say, well, what difference does it make? You know, how does that affect me? Well, it does. And we have to figure out ways to make that more clear, in a more succinct, easy way for people to understand.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

“We need to do a better job of making this relevant to the folks who don’t think it applies to them.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

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"It's practical, and it's not just the theory. And it's important to know where we came from, and the theory and the history behind a lot of things. But unless you put it into some sort of practical purpose, then I don't think it's as valuable." (Republican Policy Influencer)

- Parents play an important role in instilling the importance of civic engagement in children. Modeling good behaviors, like staying informed and going to the polls, begin with parents. Where parents fail in this regard (and there is a recognition that many parents do fail in fulfilling this role), many believe it is the role of K-12 schools to fill in the gap.

"I don't think that we should be depending on entities to educate our kids. We should be...playing a major role in their education." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"Parental engagement, I think that's key on this front." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"If your parents are not teaching you that voting is one of the most important things that you could ever do as a citizen of this country, then it's not ingrained in you. You're not learning about it. You learn through your parents, even if it's just through osmosis." (Democratic Policy Influencers)

"I think it's the parents. I mean, it's not that education can't always be improved, but everybody wants to blame the teachers or schools for everything." (Democratic Policy Influencers)

- Boy/girl scout leaders, coaches, church leaders, and other organizations with a "civic hook" also share the responsibility of instilling the values of civic engagement in children and young adults.

"You do have the problem of, what happens if you don't have parents who are engaged? Are there other organizations out there that can somewhat meet the gap? And I'm thinking civic groups, scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys' Club, Girls' Club, even church youth groups...any groups that our kids are involved in that can conceivably have a civic hook." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"Going back to your original question, that you need to be taught responsibility from all types of sources, not only your parents, but your teachers and neighbors, and that has not been instilled to the same degree that it was in generations past." (Republican Policy Influencer)

- When it comes to civic knowledge, the media is recognized as playing a role in educating the citizenry about important issues. The quality of news sources dictates the types of information from which people will make decisions and influence the workings of our democracy, and several participants lament the lack of analysis and thorough examination of the issues by the media today.

5 Colleges are recognized as playing a unique and important role in raising the level of civic knowledge and engagement.

- Policymakers assign slightly higher grades to higher education institutions for preparing students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful and contributing members of today's economy than to be responsible citizens. But higher education institutions do not receive "A's" in either category, demonstrating there is room for improvement.
- Colleges and universities are seen as being uniquely positioned to influence levels of civic engagement. Higher education institutions often have the resources, flexibility in scheduling, and community environment in which to promote civic engagement. And while not everyone attends college, most who attend are of voting age.

"Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to model and teach respectable dialogue." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"In college, you have much more debate-type activities, discourse, than you have in high school. And...the ability to model respectful behavior, respect for other views, diverse views, all of that I think is what will stay over time." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"I feel like college is the last marker before someone is, like, released into the real world. And I just feel like colleges and universities, if they have an opportunity to play a key role in civic education, that they should." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I think they're best positioned to play that role." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"Things that get people engaged. So whether it's debates or bringing well-known speakers on campus, like a speaker series of well-known public figures to talk about those things. Something that's engaging." (Republican Policy Influencer)

6 There is some resistance to elevating civic knowledge and engagement in higher education to the same level as workforce development.

- Participants were asked to react to the following statement: "While economic opportunity is a very important college outcome, it is equally important for colleges to build civic capacity, including the knowledge, judgment, and commitment to solve societal problems and ensure the integrity and vitality of our democratic society. Workforce development and civic engagement can and should be complementary."
- When it comes to the goal of higher education, raising the focus on civic learning and democratic engagement to the level of career and workforce readiness causes contention. Not all policy influencers agree that a focus on increasing civic engagement is equally important as preparing students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workplace.

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"It's not obvious to me that that's right. They can become complimentary, I'll agree with that, but it may be that, for my orthopedic surgeon, I sort of don't mind that they're monomaniacal about focusing on orthopedic surgery. I may think, for society, we're better off if they sort of go and vote well, but I need a new hip." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"If you can name all the senators, and every branch of government, and you know what the budget is every year, but you can't translate that into a skill where you can get paid for it, then I would say that it's not equally as important." (Republican Policy Influencer)

- Opposition to the approach is strongest among Republicans, who argue the primary role of higher education institutions is workforce readiness and career development. Students invest in higher education with the goal of capitalizing on that investment and securing a job after graduation. Increasing civic knowledge and engagement is important, but should be secondary to ensuring colleges and universities deliver on their responsibility to prepare students for the workforce.

"What many of these things mean are open to...judgment. I certainly don't think that it's equal to any, or I don't think it should be equal to any extent of the imagination the absolute, first and last thing college...is [it] give[s] you a means to have a career and earn a living." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"Equally important? I don't think so, no. But important, yes...I think it's more important for someone going to college to learn skills to make money, and pay taxes, and be a productive member of society. That's what the main focus of a college education should be. It should not necessarily be...teaching civic responsibility." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"I would still say that the economic opportunity you get from college is far more important than the civic engagement...Your economic opportunity is going to drive your opportunity for civic engagement...that should be the horse that comes before the cart." (Republican Policy Influencer)

7 Nonetheless, few disagree with the notion that increasing the level of civic education should be a priority. Many believe civic education should be part of the college experience, if students are given the flexibility to incorporate the study into their standing curriculum.

- Participants support civic knowledge and engagement as a key outcome of a college education, although some resist describing it as a "requirement" as it raises concerns about adding more to students' already full plate of required courses.

"I think it's a key role for the college. That doesn't mean to say other institutions don't have that role, but their colleges are building good citizenship essentially." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"If the goal of the university is to produce a well-rounded student, then I think that you should have a well-rounded education." (Republican Policy Influencer)

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“While making money is an important college outcome, it’s just as important to be concerned about your society. I would say that making money or having the ability to earn a living is one of the outcomes of college. I think what we’ve all been saying is that the other important part is to develop a means of critical thinking, a means of teaching you how to be a responsible person, individually. And then, these other things will flow from that.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

“I think it should be something that is offered. I don’t know if I would go to that it should be required.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

- Flexibility is important. While some Democrats favor the idea of making civic engagement part of a core curriculum like science or writing, Republicans are sensitive to the need to not burden students with further requirements. They argue that students today struggle to afford college, and increasing the number of requirements adds to the amount of time and money necessary to graduate, or detracts from time spent on other worthwhile educational opportunities.

“A lot of kids go to college for the economic opportunity. And...they’re working, holding down one or two jobs. They don’t really have time for much more than their...basic coursework.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“This doesn’t necessarily need to be a course, but that these are things that could be woven into a four-year, overall curriculum or college experience.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

- Both sides say integrating civics lessons into an established curriculum or existing coursework is beneficial to teach graduates civic and social responsibility. There is a need to make clear the goal of increasing civic knowledge and engagement is not simply a civics course, but can be woven into the core of a curriculum or major.

“I think to choose how to participate...is a good lesson and a good message.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“I think if schools [had] community service or some kind of internship where you would go, and you would do something that’s out of your element...that was...a required course, that would be helpful for somebody who maybe wasn’t naturally inclined to do something like that. It might open their eyes.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“Something like having civic knowledge and civic engagement makes a difference in your every day life and in contributing to society, one would think, more so than the average person being forced to take a trigonometry class. So it’s interesting that no one has a problem with being forced to take math requirements, where you may not ever, I’m never using calculus ever in my life, but you’re forced to have to take that, versus a civics class, which has a practical application in your everyday life, but people have a problem with that. I find that to be incongruent.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

8 Problem-solving skills and a sense of civility and open-mindedness are seen as foundational tools for civic learning. These outcomes impact not only civic engagement, but also how people interact and perform in the workplace.

- Democratic and Republican policy influencers react favorably to the components of 21st century civic learning tested (see 1.3 in the Appendix). **Problem-solving skills, civility and mutual respect, and open-mindedness and tolerance of different points of view and cultures** are particularly important. Training in problem solving is vital to being a good citizen and achieving success in the workplace. Mutual respect and open-mindedness are key values to a flourishing democracy, and ones we have lost track of in our current political climate.

“Problem solving is really vital...because it doesn’t just apply to a specific participation piece but just being a competent human being who can think for themselves.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“I think stressing the importance of open-mindedness and tolerance as well as civility and mutual respect is something that we’ve sort of lost track of. And my sense is that’s...extremely important...if you haven’t learned it by the time you get into college, you better damn well learn it in college, because...otherwise we’re headed toward a very difficult world.” (Democratic Policy Influencer)

“I don’t really care what career you’re talking about, I don’t really care if you’re being a good citizen or any of it...being able to read something, as well as hear an argument, focus on and analyze the pro and con, figure out what it means for you, and then, being able to articulate how...it means something for you, it’s a fundamental glue, as far as I’m concerned.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

“It also helps you to understand context and...the value of the country that we do live in, if you have more knowledge of how everybody else lives in the world...if you get more perspective of the value of what you have, perhaps you will take better care of it.” (Republican Policy Influencer)

- References to “hands-on,” practical experience as a means of increasing civic engagement stands out. Policy leaders in both groups point to internships, community outreach, school-sponsored debates, and study abroad programs as effective vehicles for making students more civic minded. The Republican-leaning influencers particularly are focused on the importance of today’s college students experiencing more “real-world” learning and experiences that require them to put theory to practice. Democrats are drawn to notions of “service learning” and support academic work that teaches students civic education by engaging them with the broader community.

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"I really enjoyed the, you know, civic learning cannot be learned only by studying books. Democratic knowledge and capabilities...are honed through hands-on, face-to-face, actual engagement, in the midst of differing perspectives. And that's great. I mean, like a lot of college is theory and how things are supposed to work. But, you know, in theory, communism works." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"Some of the words that I used [are] hands-on, engagement, informed, [and] thoughtful. I think these are a good foundation, a good template for developing a civic education curriculum." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"All these schools are located within a community. Communities have lots of needs. And I think it's imperative for schools to reach out and to be very closely connected with their communities." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"There's such an opportunity for a win/win with the school where the schools that are within the community, you know, have these eager young people who are just in a way free help and dying to get experience. You have communities with a lot of needs, and a lot of times putting those things together just leads to a great experience." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

- Most believe the outlined approach to promoting civic learning and democratic engagement is both aspirational and achievable, although some say modifying behavior is a greater challenge than increasing knowledge. Elevating a student's level of civic knowledge is viewed as more actionable than encouraging them to become a more engaged citizen. However, many say knowledge and action go hand-in-hand, and actions to promote civic education will lead to stronger engagement.

"There are two very distinct things here, which is one is the sort of content, like know the history, the setting, and then the other is behavioral, right, which is all the collaborative, respect, all those sort of things. I think the content-wise is a lot easier to achieve, obviously, than the behavioral one." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

"All the behavioral ones are I think the same broad behavior if you will. That's the one that is more aspirational, I think, because to influence behavior is much more difficult than simply teach a content of, I mean, the first ones are things that you study, if you will, right? So it's...model as behavior, it's much more difficult." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

9 The idea that all students, regardless of the type of higher-ed institution they attend, should receive a civic education is well supported. However, Republicans are more divided than Democrats as to whether civic learning and engagement should be a requirement of higher ed, or the choice of the individual student.

- Policy influencers were asked to read the following statements and select the one that comes closer to their point of view: A) Civic learning and engagement should be integral to and a requirement of post-secondary learning for all students whether in college, community colleges, or universities, and no matter their area of study; and B) Whether to pursue civic learning and democratic engagement is a choice that should be left to the individual student, and it is not the role of colleges to require that students complete civic learning.
- Participants in both groups point to the need and importance of increasing civic learning and engagement in higher education, regardless of a student's major and concentration, or the type of institution they attend. Establishing a baseline of requirements ensures that all students are exposed to civic education, even those who attend community colleges or are working toward highly technical degrees.

"I think there absolutely should be a requirement. It goes back to my point about national service. I think it's part of being a good citizen. And, choosing to participate is a good lesson and a good message." (Democratic Policy influencer)

"You can't be a CEO of any successful public company in the United States without knowing there are three branches of government, even though you're the president. You have to know these things to be a successful business leader. So absolutely, at that level, without a doubt, they're complimentary." (Republican Policy Influencer)

"If you go in to study...to be a civil engineer...you have to be aware of issues on political systems, on economics, on finance, on infrastructure, because that all affects you." (Democratic Policy Influencer)

- Although Republicans acknowledge the value and importance of incorporating civics into higher education, they are more likely to disagree about whether the discipline should be a requirement, or a choice left to individual students. Some are skeptical of a top-down approach to increasing civic engagement, while seeing value in providing students with options and incentives to enrich their civic education.

10 Messages aimed at increasing support for college learning for democracy and civic responsibility that rise to the top emphasize broadly the importance of civic engagement to a vibrant democracy, the unique position of colleges and universities to address the problem, and the link between civic knowledge and success in the workplace.

- The link between civic knowledge and engagement in family, community, and our democracy is convincing. Many see colleges and universities as the “last stop” before many students enter the workforce. As a result, they are in a unique position to impact today’s lagging civic engagement. Also persuasive are arguments that emphasize the civic dimensions of the workplace and link democratic learning to workplace success. These statements are viewed as pragmatic, rational, and quantifiable. The messages outlined below scored best across the two audiences of Democrats and Republicans.
 - The heart of a vibrant democracy is educated, engaged citizens who are able to make choices for their families, their communities, and our democracy. America’s colleges and universities can and should play a key role in this.
 - Informed and respectful civil discourse is essential if the nation is going to solve its many economic, social, and political problems. College and universities are uniquely positioned to model and teach respectful democratic dialogue and problem solving. Higher education should provide all college students with the knowledge and skills to be engaged in productive ways in rebuilding the fabric of American society.
 - There is a civic dimension to every field of study, including career and technical fields, as well as to every workplace. Industries and services have ethical and social responsibilities of their own. Workers at all levels need to anticipate the civic implications of their choices and actions, and it is important to be able to look at all sides of an issue and take seriously positions with which you may disagree.
 - A flourishing economy requires the same skills that support citizenship. Civic and democratic learning opportunities (e.g., service learning, community-based research, courses on U.S. history, diversity, and global issues) provide broad skills and knowledge that are useful both for success in the workplace and to prepare students to be active and engaged citizens.

11 Remaining arguments are less persuasive, although notable differences exist by party affiliation. Messages emphasizing civic knowledge and engagement to seal divisions within America and promote greater cultural awareness fuel mixed reactions, while the link between civic learning in higher ed and higher completion rates has less resonance.

- Across the board, Democrats are more favorable to all five remaining arguments. Democrats are more receptive to messages centered around the idea of promoting civic education as a means of exposing students to different cultures and global perspectives, and those with a focus on first-time college graduates and minority students. Republicans have a greater resistance to arguments that link greater civic knowledge and engagement to overcoming diversity-driven tensions in American communities. They rank this message lowest overall.
 - 45% of first-time undergraduates enroll at community colleges, including more than 50% of African-American, Latino, and Native-American undergraduates. Since the majority of these students do not transfer beyond the community college, it is important that civic learning be integrated into the community college curriculum.
 - Civic and democratic learning opportunities provide students with essential knowledge about the larger world in which they will work and live and in which they will be called upon to act responsibly.
 - America's diversity (increasing minority and immigrant populations) causes tensions in many communities. Americans today are pulling apart rather than coming together to solve important national problems. Requiring college students to learn about cultures other than their own (both in the United States and around the world) is important for our nation's future and will help bring Americans together in positive ways.
- For both groups, the message linking civic engagement to greater knowledge and participation levels is vague and unconvincing.
 - Research shows that a focus on civic learning and democratic engagement in post-secondary education has a positive effect on civic knowledge and participation levels.
- The message centering on the importance of civic learning in higher ed falls to the bottom. There is uncertainty about calling on higher ed to focus on civic learning and democratic engagement where workforce readiness should be a top priority. Others are skeptical of the link between civic learning and increased retention and completion rates, and they question whether it can be proven and whether it is society's responsibility to ensure that students graduate from college.
 - At this time when far too many students leave college without completing a degree, students' participation in civic learning also has been shown to increase retention and completion rates.

Thoughts On Approaching The Issue Of Civic Learning And Engagement In Higher Ed

1. Rather than getting into a debate about the degree of our nation's civic deficit or recession, focus on the goal of increasing civic responsibility—a goal that both audiences resoundingly agree is important.
2. Recognize the broadly held belief that civic learning can and should start at a young age both at home and in K-12 schools, while highlighting the unique role that higher education institutions can play in furthering civic learning and fostering civic responsibility.
3. Proceed cautiously in trying to elevate civic learning to the level of workforce readiness. While some are supportive, this is a theme that generates debate and some strong disagreement.
4. Focus on approaches to learning and learning outcomes for civic education that are highly relevant for both civic engagement and success in the workplace.
 - a. Approaches to learning that appeal are those that go beyond the study of books to include hands-on, face-to-face, active engagement in the midst of differing perspectives.
 - b. Learning outcomes of civic education that readily apply and are seen as critical to the workplace include problem-solving skills, critical-thinking skills, civility and mutual respect, and open-mindedness and tolerance of different points of view and cultures.
 - c. The discussions suggest potential in focusing on the civic dimension of jobs, including understanding the civic implications of actions and being able to look at all sides of an issue, even one with which you disagree.
5. Proactively address concerns about adding more requirements to students' heavy academic loads by illustrating how civic learning can be integrated into existing curriculum (both for general education and in majors). This will help address the misconception that increasing civic learning in college simply means adding more courses.
6. Beware that messages about the value of civic education in providing an understanding of other cultures and global contexts do not resonate to the same degree across partisan lines. In these two groups at least, this theme generates more support among Democratic-leaning participants than Republican-leaning individuals in the sessions.

Appendix

1.1

HANDOUT A

1. *At a time when the United States has the highest access to voting rights in our history, less than half of eligible voters exercise this right.*
2. *24% of graduating high school seniors scored at the proficient level or higher in civics in 2010, fewer than in 2006 or 1998.*
3. *Half of states no longer require civics education for high school graduation.*
4. *The U.S. ranked 139th in voter participation of 172 world democracies in 2007.*
5. *College seniors scored only 54% correct answers on a test measuring civic knowledge.*
6. *In a survey of the U.S. population, only one-third of Americans could name all three branches of government; one-third couldn't name any.*
7. *Almost one-third of Americans mistakenly believed that a U.S. Supreme Court ruling could be appealed.*

1.2

HANDOUT B

While economic opportunity is a very important college outcome, it is equally important for colleges to build civic capacity, including the knowledge, judgment, and commitment to solve societal problems and ensure the integrity and vitality of our democratic society. Workforce development and civic engagement can and should be complementary.

1.3

HANDOUT C

An earlier definition of civic education that stressed familiarity with the various branches of government and acquaintance with basic information about U.S. history is essential but no longer nearly enough. Americans still need to understand how their political system works and how to influence it. But they also need to understand the cultural and global contexts in which democracy is both deeply valued and deeply contested. Moreover, the full competencies in civic learning cannot be learned only by studying books; democratic knowledge and capabilities are honed through hands-on, face-to-face, active engagement in the midst of differing perspectives about how to address common problems that affect the well-being of the nation and the world.

Civic learning that includes knowledge, skills, values, and the capacity to work with others on civic and societal challenges can help increase the number of informed, thoughtful, and public-minded citizens more prepared to contribute in the context of the diverse, dynamic, globally connected United States. Civic learning should prepare students with knowledge and for action in our communities.

Components of 21st century civic learning might include such things as:

- *Knowledge of U.S. history, political structures, and core democratic principles and founding documents;*
- *Knowledge of diverse cultures and religions in the U.S. and around the world;*
- *Ethical integrity and reasoning ability;*
- *Collaborative decision-making skills;*
- *Open-mindedness and tolerance of different points of view and cultures;*
- *Problem-solving skills;*
- *Civility and mutual respect.*

1.4

HANDOUT D

A) Civic learning and engagement should be integral to and a requirement of post-secondary learning for all students whether in college, community colleges, or universities, and no matter their area of study.

B) Whether to pursue civic learning and democratic engagement is a choice that should be left to the individual student, and it is not the role of colleges to require students complete civic learning.

1.5

HANDOUT E

1. *The heart of a vibrant democracy is educated, engaged citizens who are able to make choices for their families, their communities, and our democracy. America's colleges and universities can and should play a key role in this.*
2. *Research shows that a focus on civic learning and democratic engagement in post-secondary education has a positive effect on civic knowledge and participation levels.*
3. *At this time when far too many students leave college without completing a degree, students' participation in civic learning also has been shown to increase retention and completion rates.*
4. *A flourishing economy requires the same skills that support citizenship. Civic and democratic learning opportunities (e.g., service learning, community-based research, courses on U.S. history, diversity and global issues) provide broad skills and knowledge that are useful both for success in the workplace and to prepare students to be active and engaged citizens.*
5. *Informed and respectful civil discourse is essential if the nation is going to solve its many economic, social, and political problems. College and universities are uniquely positioned to model and teach respectful democratic dialogue and problem solving. Higher education should provide all college students with the knowledge and skills to be engaged in productive ways in rebuilding the fabric of American society.*
6. *America's diversity (increasing minority and immigrant populations) causes tensions in many communities. Americans today are pulling apart rather than coming together to solve important national problems. Requiring college students to learn about cultures other than their own (both in the U.S. and around the world) is important for our nation's future and will help bring Americans together in positive ways.*
7. *Civic and democratic learning opportunities provide students with essential knowledge about the larger world in which they will work and live and in which they will be called upon to act responsibly.*
8. *45% of first-time undergraduates enroll at community colleges, including more than 50% of African-American, Latino, and Native-American undergraduates. Since the majority of these students do not transfer beyond the community college, it is important that civic learning be integrated into the community college curriculum.*
9. *There is a civic dimension to every field of study, including career and technical fields, as well as to every workplace. Industries and services have ethical and social responsibilities of their own. Workers at all levels need to anticipate the civic implications of their choices and actions, and it is important to be able to look at all sides of an issue and take seriously positions with which you may disagree.*