The Community Colleges' Role in Developing Students' Civic Outcomes: Results of a National Pilot

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Abstract

Objective: Ideally, community colleges both democratize opportunity and develop in students the civic skills necessary to meaningfully participate in a democratic society. This national pilot study examines the individual and institutional factors associated with greater civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge among students after at least 1 year of community college attendance. **Method:** Using survey data obtained from both community college students and administrators via a new civic outcomes survey and institutional questionnaire, this research utilizes both descriptive and multivariate statistics to identify associations between individual and institutional characteristics and behaviors leading to greater civic outcomes. **Results:** Holding students' incoming characteristics and pre-college behaviors constant, this study shows that community college students' academic and extracurricular behaviors, as well as institutions' intentionality toward civic engagement, are associated with higher levels of civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge. **Contributions:** Results of this study indicate that by making visible and measurable commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement on campus, and by creating opportunities for students to interact with one another, wrestle with thorny social or political issues, and engage in their communities, colleges can help create informed citizens who are skilled in democratic practices and committed to lifelong engagement. For community colleges, this is especially important, given their large population of students from

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groups historically marginalized in the nation's education and political systems and their mission to both democratize opportunity and do the work of democracy.

Keywords

civic engagement, civic learning, student outcomes, community colleges, outcomes of education

In an era when the outcomes of higher education are often reduced to those that are easiest to measure (i.e., graduation rates) or that tie directly to notions of workforce preparation (i.e., occupational certificates), the *other* outcomes students gain—the intangibles, the soft skills, the ability to communicate effectively and work well with others, the capacity to advance in a career instead of simply function in an occupation—are frequently overlooked. So too are the skills that allow young adults to do more than blindly consume products and ideas, the civic capacities necessary to participate meaningfully in local communities and in a democratic society. It is precisely these outcomes that are necessary for democracy to thrive, for American workers and workplaces to be creative and nimble, for citizens to engage in work (paid and unpaid) that makes them happy and fulfilled, and for people who differ from one another to work together to solve important problems.

Civic capacity and social responsibility should thus be a "non-negotiable, sought-after outcome for every student, whatever the specialty" (McTighe Musil, 2015, para. 8). Yet, civic education is *especially* important at community colleges, as they are institutions committed to lessening educational inequalities and providing educational programs and services leading to stronger communities. As "Democracy's Colleges," or "The People's Colleges," community colleges perform (or, at least, were intended to perform) both a democratizing role—to facilitate social mobility by admitting all comers regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, educational preparedness, or professional or vocational goals—and a civic function: to engage students in preparing for life and work as part of an involved citizenry (Kisker & Ronan, 2012, p. 5). Ronan (2012) described this duality in the community college mission as both "democratizing opportunity, and doing the work of democracy" (p. 31).

In addition to providing transfer education and workforce preparation, community colleges do the work of democracy in a multitude of ways. Efforts to civically engage students range from more traditional methods such as service learning, voter registration drives, and classroom discussion of policy issues, to more intensive forms of democratic engagement, including deliberative dialogues, community organizing and advocacy, civic agency programs, candidate and election-issue forums, and opportunities to write or speak to legislators about issues of concern on campus or in students' communities (Kisker, 2016; Ronan & Kisker, 2016). Many of these activities are similar to those provided at 4-year universities or community-based organizations, but can be all the more impactful at community colleges, where many students hail from low-income or racial groups that have been historically marginalized in both the nation's educational and political systems (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

As a recent inventory of community college civic programs and practices (Kisker, 2016) illustrates, efforts to promote civic learning and democratic engagement at community colleges are led by faculty, administrators, staff, and, sometimes, students. At some institutions, civic engagement is infused into the curriculum or embedded as a graduation requirement; elsewhere, it exists primarily in extracurricular programming. Some colleges focus primarily on electoral politics and political engagement whereas others stress activism and involvement in causes dear to local communities. Some programs are highly institutionalized and supported on campus—for example, by incorporating civic engagement into faculty development and/or tenure or advancement policies—whereas others exist within isolated departments or are sustained by a small group of committed faculty or staff.

Educators—especially those who are involved in civic initiatives—believe strongly that these programs and practices are useful to students and lead to an improved ability to participate meaningfully in a democratic society. But outside the literature focused specifically on service learning (see, for example, American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2010; Traver & Katz, 2014) and a handful of institution-specific surveys, we know very little about the extent and ways in which community colleges develop the civic capacities of their students. Indeed, the Civic Learning Task Force, a partnership between the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, recently commissioned a review of all instruments being used by colleges and universities to assess civic learning. This review (Reason & Hemer, 2014) reinforces the dearth of instrumentation in this area, finding that no existing surveys "fully assessed the entire construct of civic learning" (p. 3).

To address this void in the literature, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges and the Democracy Commitment (TDC, 2011)—a national initiative providing a platform for the development and expansion of civic engagement in community colleges—developed a new survey to assess civic learning, which we define as students' progress toward becoming "engaged citizens, [who are] proud of their rights, thoughtful about their responsibilities, and informed about their choices" (p. 1). This definition, borrowed from TDC's (2011) *Declaration*, emphasizes the importance of civic capacity, agency, and knowledge in addition to civic behavior, and encompasses both political involvement and civic action in one's community. In spring 2015, nine community colleges from across the nation participated in a pilot administration of the civic outcomes survey, allowing for the first national examination of civic outcomes among community college students. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

Research Question 1: Holding pre-college civic behaviors constant, what individual behaviors and characteristics are associated with greater civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge among students with at least 1 year of community college experience?
Research Question 2: Holding individual characteristics and behaviors constant, what institutional programs, policies, or characteristics are associated with greater

civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge among students with at least 1 year of community college experience?

Results from this pilot and future administrations of the survey will ultimately provide useful insights into how community colleges can work to develop students' civic outcomes and, in turn, enhance students' capacity to participate meaningfully in their communities and in our democracy. After a brief discussion of the literature related to assessing students' civic outcomes, this article describes the conceptual framework, methods, and results of the national civic outcomes pilot, administered in spring 2015.

Assessment of Civic Outcomes in the Literature

The literature is clear that there is a connection between higher education and civic participation, although the nature of that association is more opaque. For example, several scholars (Lopez & Brown, 2006; Marcelo, 2007; Newell, 2014) have found that young people with at least some college experience have higher rates of voting participation than their peers who did not attend college. Similarly, numerous scholars have found that civic programs at 4-year colleges influence, among other things, students' cognitive and affective outcomes, racial understanding, sense of social responsibility, commitment to service, and leadership and communication skills (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkardt, 2001; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001).

Yet, there is not a full understanding of *why* college yields this effect—is it the fostering of civic skills and political knowledge that engages students in democratic and civic processes or simply the provision of a space where young people can connect with others, expand their horizons, and view themselves as part of a larger world (Jarvis, Montoya, & Mulvoy, 2005)? This unknown is exacerbated by the fact that, as Finley (2011) pointed out, "the wealth of empirical research on civic engagement has largely focused upon activities connected with service-learning" (p. 3). Indeed, we know far less about the outcomes of democracy-building activities such as deliberative dialogues, community organizing and advocacy, and problem solving within diverse groups (Elder, Seligsohn, & Hofrenning, 2007). The scholarship that exists (e.g., Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2006; Colby, 2008; Harringer & McMillan, 2007; Hurtado, 2009; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007; Zuniga, Williams, & Berger, 2005) is frequently limited in its ability to generalize conclusions due to small sample sizes or specialized case studies. And although scholars believe this small body of research is "highly suggestive of the range of effects on students' civic knowledge, skills, and values that may be developed through interventions that specifically integrate intentional, politically-centered, and democratically-guided forms of civic engagement" (Finley, 2011, p. 14), there is clearly much more we can learn about the specific ways in which colleges and universities engender growth in students' civic outcomes.

Furthermore, despite the close association between concepts of democracy and the mission of community colleges (Kisker & Ronan, 2012), nearly all assessments of civic learning in higher education—including those cited in the preceding paragraph—have

occurred at 4-year universities or private, liberal arts colleges. Indeed, only a handful of studies have attempted to assess levels of civic engagement among community college students, and in many of these studies, civic engagement is operationalized differently, making meta-analyses difficult. For example, Lopez and Brown (2006) focused on political participation, finding that community college students were more likely than high school graduates—but less likely than 4-year college students—to vote or obtain news on a daily basis. They were about as likely as 4-year college students to register to vote or volunteer. Newell (2014) similarly concluded that community college students were somewhat more civically engaged than high school graduates, but less engaged than their counterparts at 4-year colleges and universities.

Other researchers define civic engagement primarily in terms of service learning, finding that service learning is associated with gains in academic knowledge and personal growth (AACC, 2010; Lizzul et al., 2015). In particular, the self-reflection component of service learning course has been shown to hone critical thinking and writing skills (Ash & Clayton, 2009), and the application of course content to real-world challenges, as well as exposure to career opportunities, can help students feel better prepared for the workplace (Banda-Ralph, 2006; Hayward, 2014). Service learning has also been associated with improved persistence rates (AACC, 2010; Banda-Ralph, 2006).

Still other researchers define civic engagement more broadly. For example, through extensive follow-up surveys, Mair (2016) found that students at one community college were able to transfer the dialogue and deliberation skills they learned to other contexts, "from the public spheres of work and community to the personal spheres of friends, family, and significant others" (p. 8). She also reported that students feel more prepared, inspired, and responsible for addressing social issues after participating in a deliberative workshop or forum. Similarly, Hoffman (2016) found that co-curricular presentations are an effective way of developing civic engagement on community college campuses, and that individuals who attend multiple civic activities exhibit higher levels of civic engagement—as measured by post-event surveys—than those who attend only one event. In other words, the more students are exposed to opportunities for civic learning, the greater their civic outcomes. This finding reinforces scholarship at both 2- and 4-year colleges, which suggests that the more frequently students participate in a continuum of civic learning practices, the more they make gains on a variety of civic outcomes (Bowen, 2010; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012).

Although single-institution studies such as these add to our understanding of the effects of certain civic programs, the lack of agreement about what civic engagement *is* reduces their generalizability. Furthermore, because none of the studies conducted in community colleges control for students' civic outcomes *prior* to entering the institution, it is difficult to make definitive statements about the role of the community college in developing students' civic capacities. By categorizing the civic outcomes of college into those related to civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge (each of which is further defined later in this article), this study aims to operationalize the concept of civic engagement in specific and replicable terms. As well, by statistically controlling for students' pre-college characteristics and behaviors, this study allows for an assessment of the individual behaviors and institutional programs, policies, and

characteristics that lead to greater civic outcomes among students, which in turn maximizes its utility among community college faculty and administrators concerned with improving civic learning and democratic engagement on their campus.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by Astin's (1993) Input–Environment–Outcome (I-E-O) Model of college impact, which takes into account student characteristics at the time of initial entry to the institution, the environment and experiences to which students are exposed, and finally students' characteristics or outcomes after exposure to that environment. This model addresses a fundamental limitation with non-experimental studies in which students who choose a particular college experience (e.g., engaging in political advocacy) may differ from those who decline to participate in the same activity, thus making it difficult to determine whether the activity or the students themselves are responsible for differences in outcomes between the two. Because the I-E-O model controls for as many underlying population characteristics (inputs) as possible, it eliminates the self-selection bias created by students choosing various college activities and experiences.

Our investigation thus presumes that students arrive at community colleges with individual background characteristics—both demographic and behavioral—that provide a baseline for their civic development, and that within the community college environment, there are multiple programs, practices, policies, people, cultures, and experiences that affect students' civic outcomes (Astin, 1993). By statistically controlling for students' incoming characteristics, we can ascertain the relative impact of the college environment—and student behaviors in that environment—on the development of students' civic outcomes. Although Astin's (1993) I-E-O model has been applied primarily to studies of college impact and student engagement, a few scholars have utilized it to investigate the effects of service learning on students' civic responsibility, educational attainment, learning, and life skills (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 1999; Astin et al., 2006).

Method

Instruments

To collect data on both demographic (input) and college-level (environmental) factors that might influence students' civic outcomes, we designed two instruments. The first is a civic outcomes survey consisting of questions assessing students' civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge after at least 1 year of community college attendance, as well as questions relating to student demographics, enrollment patterns, and certain pre-college behaviors. Individual questions included in the civic outcomes survey and accompanying institutional questionnaire were informed by a wide swath of cross-disciplinary literature and are discussed in detail in Kisker, Newell, and Ronan (2014). To test the validity of the instruments, four California community colleges

were invited to participate in a preliminary pilot study in spring 2014. Based on results from this regional pilot (described in Kisker, Newell, & Weintraub, 2016), the civic outcomes survey and institutional questionnaire were refined to allow for more variability within responses and outcome.[1]

Civic outcomes survey. Questions on the civic outcomes survey related to civic agency ask students to assess (via Likert-type scales) their view of themselves as part of campus or larger community, as an individual who can have an impact on what happens in this country, as having something to offer the world, as someone who can speak out for themselves and others, as well as someone who after finishing college will work with others to promote social or political change, demonstrate leadership in the community or workplace, and/or help others who may not be as well off.

Questions related to civic capacity ask students to assess (via Likert-type scales) their ability to have a civic conversation about controversial issues; have views challenged by others; work with others; voice opinions; understand people from other cultures, races, or ethnicities; or be part of something bigger than oneself to effect change, as well as whether or not they have the tools necessary to develop an informed position on a social or political issue and/or communicate with someone whose beliefs are different from one's own.

Questions related to civic behavior (both prior to and since entering college) ask students to indicate (via Likert-type scales) how often they have expressed opinions on issues via social media or the Internet; participated in a campaign; raised awareness about an issue, party, or group; persuaded others to vote for a particular candidate or party; discussed politics, social, or community issues; signed an online or paper petition; raised money for an issue, party, or group; joined organizations; held leadership roles; made speeches or presentations; volunteered; engaged in service learning; and/or recruited others to participate in a community or civic activity. Students were also asked to respond to yes/no questions about whether they had registered to vote; voted in a student election; voted in a local, state, or federal election; taken a college-level political science or government course; or taken a college-level course dealing with social, political, or economic inequality. Questions related to civic knowledge included both self-reported gains in understanding of global, national, and community issues (via a Likert-type scale) and two content questions assessing general civic knowledge.

Institutional questionnaire. The second instrument is an institutional questionnaire that asks each college's liaison to TDC about college-level factors known to influence student engagement and the various ways in which their institution works to develop civic learning and democratic engagement among its students. TDC liaisons were encouraged to confer with colleagues in academic and student affairs to provide accurate answers to each question. Specifically, the institutional questionnaire includes questions about each community college:

- Institutional intentionality toward civic engagement: civic engagement cited in college mission, strategic plan, and/or marketing materials; existence of a

central office or coordinating infrastructure to guide civic initiatives; dedicated budget allocations for civic engagement; and Carnegie Community Engagement classification.

- Academic focus on civic engagement: existence of a required civic course or activity for graduation, existence of a certificate or degree in civic engagement, number of academic programs that require a civic activity or course, number of courses with a civic engagement designation, and number of service-learning courses, community internships, civic leadership courses, and/or community organizing courses offered by a college.
- Faculty focus on civic engagement: existence of a civic requirement in faculty tenure or advancement policies, frequency of institutional incentives for participation in civic activities, and frequency of professional development opportunities addressing civic learning.
- Co-curricular focus on civic engagement: number of student clubs, governments, and newspapers that focus on civic engagement, and frequency with which a college engages in voter registration drives, civic forums, deliberative dialogs, campus-wide workshops, and/or democracy walls or similar civic spaces.

Survey Administration

In spring 2015, we digitally administered the civic outcomes survey to the entire student bodies at nine community colleges, all members of TDC.[2] Although all committed to civic engagement, the purposively selected institutions were geographically diverse, represented a variety of urban, suburban, and rural environments (as identified by the Carnegie Classifications), and ranged in size from 2,500 to 34,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students. The racial/ethnic composition of students at the colleges also varied substantially, with relatively large numbers of African Americans at some, a preponderance of Asians or Latinos at others, and heavily White populations elsewhere. Seven of the nine colleges received a small stipend for participating; the remaining two agreed to participate without compensation.

From a total of 98,838 recipients, 4,788 usable surveys were returned, for an aggregate 5% response rate (response rates varied from 2% to 13% among the nine colleges). The sample mirrored the student populations at our nine colleges and included more women than men, more full-timers than part-timers, a higher rate of students between the ages of 20 and 24 than those in other age groups, and about equal representation of White students to students of color. Data were weighted by institution to account for substantial differences in the number of respondents at each of the nine colleges.

Although the low-response rate might raise concerns for the potential of nonresponse bias, there is substantial evidence that surveys—particularly those designed for college students—are robust in low-response rate environments (Fosnacht, Sarraf, Howe, & Peck, in press; Hutchison, Tollefson, & Wigington, 1987; Keeter, 2012; Massey & Tourangeau, 2013; Peytchev, 2013; Pike, 2012). Indeed, using data from

online-only National Survey of Student Engagement administrations between 2010 and 2012 that achieved response rates above 50%, Fosnacht and his colleagues (in press) simulated various (lower) response rates, comparing the sample means for the simulated rates with the full sample means. They found that for surveys sent to 1,000 or more students at each institution, the correlation between the simulated sample mean (50 or more students, the equivalent of a 5% response rate) and the full sample mean ranged from .93 and .99; in other words, that reliable estimates of college student outcomes "can be achieved based on a relatively low response rate administration" (Fosnacht and his colleagues, in press, p. 16). As our survey was administered to between 2,958 and 20,248 students at each college, because the sample reflected the broader student population at each institution, and because a comparison of our results with previously reported voting patterns among community college students (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012) indicated that students in our sample voted at rates similar to the national average, we believe that our results provide reliable survey estimates.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in three stages. First, we performed descriptive and demographic cross-tab analyses of the survey data to capture a preliminary snapshot of students' levels of civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge. We then conducted a factor analysis, identifying four factors that explain most of the variance observed in questions related to students' civic outcomes. The four dependent variables in our analysis are Civic Agency, Civic Knowledge, Civic Capacity, and Civic Behavior.[3]

Questions falling into each factor are described in the "Instruments" section of this article, with the exception that questions related to voting (in student, local, state, and/or national elections) or registering to vote were not included in the Civic Behavior (or any other) dependent variable. There were two reasons for this. First, although more students voted in student elections while in college than did in high school, the percentages of students reporting that they registered or voted in a local, state, or national election while in college were very similar to the percentages stating that they did so prior to college (i.e., there was little variance between civic behaviors "prior to entering college" and "since entering college," likely because the questions were asked at the same time). Although this runs counter to literature showing that community college students are more likely than high school students to register or vote (Lopez & Brown, 2006; Marcelo, 2007; Newell, 2014), the fact that the last presidential election was in 2012—when the majority of survey respondents were still in high school—may have influenced our results.

The second reason electoral participation questions were not included in a dependent variable is because voting behavior is only one way—and, arguably, a relatively *easy* way—for students to be civically engaged (Ulsaner & Brown, 2003). Indeed, scholars now believe that other forms of civic involvement (such as participation in deliberative dialogues or partnering with others in the community to address a mutually

identified issue) are much more transformative in nature and more likely to create active citizens who are skilled in democratic processes and knowledgeable about the policy issues confronting their communities (Mathews, 2016; McCartney, Bennion, & Simpson, 2013; Ronan, 2011). Following this literature, questions related to voting or registering to vote were included in our analysis only as independent variables.

Other independent variables included a factor related to students' self-reported civic behaviors *prior to entering college*; institutional characteristics such as size, number of FTE students enrolled, campus setting, percentage of students from various racial groups; percentage of adult students; percentage of faculty employed full-time; and percentage of expenditures dedicated to instruction, academic support, and student services, as well as four composite measures comprised of related questions from the institutional questionnaire (institutional intentionality around civic engagement, academic focus on civic engagement, co-curricular focus on civic engagement, and civic engagement in faculty professional development and tenure/advancement policies).[4]

The final step in our analysis was to run regressions on each of the four dependent variables to identify the individual and institutional factors associated with greater civic outcomes. Each regression utilized a step-wise technique, allowing students' self-reported pre-college behaviors to enter the model first, followed by student characteristics, college characteristics, and, finally, student behaviors while in college. This process holds constant all of the variables that have already entered the model, allowing us to assess how much each additional variable contributes to the percentage of variance that can be explained by the analysis (Astin, 2002).

Descriptive Results

As Table 1 indicates, community college students are reasonably engaged in civic behaviors, although the percentage of students participating in a given activity is inversely related to the amount of time or energy that activity requires. For example, a greater proportion of respondents indicated more frequent participation in activities that require minimal amounts of time and energy (e.g., obtaining news, voting in a student election, discussing politics at least monthly, expressing their opinions on issues or politics via social media or the Internet, or voting in a federal, state, or location election). In contrast, fewer students reported involvement in longer term activities that tend to have a more direct and greater impact on community affairs, such as raising awareness about an issue, party, or group; recruiting others to participate in a civic or community activity; raising money for an issue, party, or group; or participating in a local, state, or national campaign. In most cases, a greater percentage of students reported engaging in civic behaviors in college than prior to college.

Attending community college also appears to influence students' civic agency and civic capacity. For example, 65% of the respondents stated that their community college experience somewhat or to a great extent contributed to their ability to have a civil conversation about controversial issues with someone whose background or views are different from their own; 63% stated that it contributed to their ability to have their

Table 1. Percentage of Students Engaging in Civic Behaviors in Community College and Prior to Community College (*N* = 4,752).

Civic behaviors	In college	Prior to college
Obtained news at least weekly	76	76
Voted in student election	74	59
Discussed politics, social, or community issues at least monthly	62	63
Voted in a local, state, or national election	56	57
Registered to vote	48	45
Participated in a group or organization at least monthly	44	45
Expressed opinions via social media or the Internet at least monthly	43	39
Made a speech or presentation at least monthly	41	31
Volunteered at least monthly	35	37
Performed a leadership role in an organization at least monthly	29	31
Engaged in service learning at least monthly	28	24
Raised awareness about an issue, party, or group at least monthly	24	21
Recruited others to participate in a community or civic activity at least monthly	22	20
Signed an online or paper petition at least monthly	20	17
Raised money for an issue, party, or group at least monthly	13	13
Persuaded others to vote for a particular issue, candidate, or party at least monthly	12	9
Participated in a local, state, or national campaign at least monthly	10	7

views challenged by others; 56% stated that it contributed to their ability to voice their opinion on campus, at work, or in the community; and 53% stated that their community college experience contributed to their ability to work with others to make a difference. As well, 79% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they can speak out for themselves and others; 77% agreed or strongly agreed that they can be part of something larger than themselves to effect change; 67% believed that they have the tools to seek out information to develop an informed position on a social or political issue; and 63% saw themselves as part of a community outside the college. In sum, the descriptive results demonstrate that students—at least those at community colleges committed to civic engagement—are civically involved and have relatively high levels of civic agency and capacity. Our regression analyses, however, go further in showing how civic participation is associated with the various civic outcomes by controlling for the impact of other demographic and environmental influences.

Table 2. Individual Predictors of Community College Civic Outcomes.

	Civic agency		Civic knowledge		Civic capacity		Civic behavior	
Weighted N =	21,822		22,035		21,462		21,127	
Pre-college behaviors			Final betas					
Civic behavior	0.14	***	0.04	***	0.08	***	0.48	***
Intermediate R^2	.07		.02		.06		.43	
Student characteristics			Final betas					
Race: African American	0.11	***	0.10	***	0.07	***	−0.05	***
Race: Latino	0.06	***	0.08	***	0.06	***	−0.03	***
Race: Asian	−0.03	***					−0.04	***
Race: Bi- or Multi-Racial			0.05	***				
Gender: Female	−0.01	*	−0.02	**	0.07	***	−0.03	***
Age	0.09	***					0.06	***
Enrollment status: full-time			0.03	***	0.02	**	−0.01	*
Speak English at home	−0.04	***	−0.10	***			0.03	***
Parent education			−0.05	***	−0.03	***		
Parent income			−0.06	***	−0.06	***	−0.07	***
Intermediate R^2	.10		.09		.10		.45	

Note. Only betas that remained significant in the final models are shown here.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Multivariate Results

Our first research question addresses the connections between individual behaviors and characteristics and greater civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge among students with at least 1 year of community college experience. These (significant) associations are displayed in Table 2. As expected, self-reported pre-community college civic behaviors accounted for 43% of the variance in Civic Behavior, as this pretest was a direct replica of the outcome measure.[5] Controlling for students' self-reported pre-community college civic behaviors, our analyses indicated that race and ethnicity are significantly associated with civic outcomes, although the effects of race on the four dependent variables differed substantially. For example, Latino/a Americans and African Americans are more likely than Whites to demonstrate higher levels of Civic Capacity, Civic Agency, and Civic Knowledge. However, Latino/a Americans and African Americans, as well as Asians (including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders), are *less* likely than Whites to engage in Civic Behavior. In addition, Asian

students are less likely than Whites to exhibit Civic Agency. Bi- or Multi-Racial students, however, are more likely than Whites to demonstrate higher levels of Civic Knowledge. Given that people of color have been historically marginalized from both education and political systems in America, the finding that non-White students demonstrate higher levels of certain civic outcomes is encouraging, although results showing lower levels of Civic Behavior among non-White students—while consistent with the literature (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995)—are less encouraging.

Other demographic variables also influence students' civic outcomes. For example, although female students are more likely than males to exhibit higher levels of Civic Capacity, they are less likely to demonstrate Civic Behavior, Civic Agency, and Civic Knowledge. This finding dovetails with a report from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Jenkins, 2005) showing that young women are more likely than men to be politically inattentive, which may speak to lower levels of Civic Knowledge and Civic Agency. As well, young women are "more likely to believe in the importance of individual efforts to improve society" (Jenkins, 2005, p. 11), such as volunteering and caring for family and friends; these individual approaches may not be captured sufficiently in our Civic Behavior factor.

As Table 2 illustrates, speaking English at home is positively associated with Civic Behavior, but inversely related to Civic Agency and Civic Knowledge (perhaps because native English speakers enter college with a higher level of civic understanding than those from immigrant families). In addition, age is positively associated with Civic Behavior and Civic Agency, and full-time enrollment contributes to higher levels of Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge but is inversely related to Civic Behavior (likely because full-time students have less time to engage in civic activities). Interestingly, parental education and income are both negatively associated with Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge, and parental income is also inversely related to Civic Behavior. These results indicate that students from less-well educated and lower income families are more likely than their peers to demonstrate multiple civic outcomes after at least 1 year of community college attendance.

Institutional Characteristics

Per Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, by controlling for students' demographics and pre-college civic behaviors, analyses related to our second research question reveal the institutional characteristics and community college student behaviors that are associated with civic outcomes. To determine how much influence community colleges have on students' civic outcomes, we first compared the intermediate R^2 values (the percentage of variance in each dependent variable accounted for by students' pre-community college behaviors and demographics) with the R^2 after all variables were taken into account. As Table 3 shows, intermediate R^2 values ranged from .09 to .45. After the environmental variables (community college characteristics and community college student behaviors) entered the models, final R^2 values ranged from .21 to .59, with those dependent variables that are easier to quantify (specifically, Civic Behavior and

Table 3. Institutional and Behavioral Predictors of Community College Civic Outcomes.

	Civic agency		Civic knowledge		Civic capacity		Civic behavior	
Weighted N =	21,822		22,322		21,462		20,882	
R^2 after pre-community college behaviors and student characteristics	.10		.09		.10		.45	
Community college characteristics			Final betas					
Total FTE	−0.03	***	−0.03	***			−0.03	***
Percentage of students above 24			−0.02	*			−0.03	***
Percentage of students on Pell	0.03	**						
Institutional intentionality around civic engagement for peer review			0.08	***	0.04	***	0.06	***
Academic focus on civic engagement	−0.03	***	0.01	*	0.02	**	0.03	***
Civic engagement in faculty professional development and tenure	−0.04	***			−0.02	*	0.01	***
Community college behaviors			Final betas					
Number of credits completed	−0.02	***	0.06	***	0.03	***		
Acted as tutor or mentor	0.11	***	−0.06	***	0.12	***	0.13	***
Interacted with a professor	0.04	***	0.11	***	0.12	***	0.10	***
Studied or prepared for class	0.14	***	0.09	***	0.10	***	−0.05	***
Participated in a racial/ethnic	0.08	***	0.12	***	0.17	***	0.23	***
Taken a course dealing with social, political, or economic inequality	0.08	***	0.26	***	0.19	***	0.08	**
Taken a political science or government class	0.07	***	0.06	***	0.07	***	0.06	***
Hours/week work for pay on-campus	0.03	***			0.03	***		
Hours/week work for pay off-campus	−0.04	***	−0.04	***	−0.07	***	−0.04	***
Attended a religious service	0.05	***	−0.02	**	−0.05	***	0.03	***
Obtain news	0.06	***	0.09	***	0.13	***	−0.02	**
Registered to vote	0.02	**	0.05	***	0.06	***	0.04	***
Voted in student election	0.03	***	0.09	***	0.07	***	0.06	***
Voted in local, state, or national election			−0.02	*	−0.06	***	0.03	***
Final R^2	.21		.29		.34		.59	

Note. Only betas that remained significant in the final models are shown here. FTE = full-time-equivalent.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Civic Capacity) falling on the higher end of the range. What is clear from this comparison is that community colleges have a substantial ability to influence students' civic outcomes. Indeed, college characteristics and college student behaviors account for the majority of the total R^2 for Civic Capacity (71%), Civic Knowledge (68%), and Civic Agency (52%). Furthermore, environmental factors explain almost a quarter (24%) of students' Civic Behavior, although this type of involvement may be only loosely tied to students' educational goals and experiences.

In addition to examining the total amount of variance that can be explained by environmental variables, we also identified the specific college characteristics that lead to greater civic outcomes (see Table 3). Our analysis shows that larger community colleges—as measured by FTE students—as well as those with higher proportions of students above the age of 24 are negatively associated with Civic Agency, Civic Knowledge, and Civic Behavior. However, colleges with greater proportions of students receiving Pell grants (a proxy for low-income status) demonstrate higher levels of Civic Agency, perhaps because these institutions may be particularly active in working to remedy the social and educational effects of income inequality.

Perhaps more important to college leaders—because it is something they can influence—institutional intentionality toward civic engagement contributes to higher levels of Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, and Civic Knowledge. This finding indicates that by making visible and meaningful institutional commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement, community colleges can do much to improve their students' civic outcomes. However, results related to a college's academic focus on civic engagement, as well as whether and how institutions incorporate civic engagement into their professional development programs or their faculty tenure/advancement policies, are not as clear. Indeed, as Table 3 illustrates, academic focus on civic engagement positively contributes to Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, and Civic Knowledge but is negatively associated with Civic Agency. Similarly, civic engagement in faculty professional development and tenure/advancement policies is associated with greater Civic Behavior, but negatively contributes to Civic Agency and Civic Capacity. Although the positive connections between these institutional variables and Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, and Civic Knowledge are logical, more investigation is required to understand the negative association with Civic Agency and, in the case of faculty development and tenure, Civic Capacity.

Students' In-College Behaviors

Although college-wide support for civic engagement may be important, it is clear from our analyses that specific student behaviors while in college may be the strongest predictors of civic outcomes (see Table 3). For example, traditional measures of academic engagement such as studying or preparing for class, interacting with a professor, and acting as a tutor or mentor are almost always positively and (relatively) strongly associated with greater civic outcomes. The two exceptions to this are a negative association between studying or preparing for class and Civic Behavior, which makes sense in light of students' time commitments, and an inverse relationship between acting as

a tutor or mentor and Civic Knowledge, which may be explained by the fact that these students had higher levels of civic understanding prior to enrolling in college.

However, several other academic and co-curricular variables are even stronger predictors of students' civic outcomes than the traditional academic measures. For example, participating in a racial or ethnic organization contributes to all four outcomes, especially Civic Behavior and Civic Capacity. Similarly, taking a course dealing with social, political, or economic inequality contributes to all of the outcomes, especially Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. Taking a political science or government course is also associated with all four civic outcomes, although the effect sizes are relatively smaller. What accounts for the strong associations between these academic and co-curricular experiences and students' civic outcomes? Perhaps these courses and racial/ethnic organizations provide structured opportunities for political behavior and/or exposure to various civic and democratic modes of engagement. Yet, they may also attract students who are already civically engaged and who see these experiences as a way of becoming more involved. Regardless, these findings provide support for institutions, such as Kingsborough Community College in Bronx, New York (McMath Turner, 2016), that require all students to take a course or participate in a co-curricular activity related to civic engagement to graduate.

Working while in community college also appears to influence students' civic outcomes, although the direction of this association depends on whether students work on- or off-campus. Specifically, the more hours students work on-campus (which is typically capped at 20), the more likely they are to demonstrate higher levels of Civic Capacity and Civic Agency. However, the more they work *off*-campus—where there are no limits to the number of hours worked—the less likely they are to exhibit Civic Capacity, Civic Agency, or Civic Knowledge, most likely because students' efforts are focused elsewhere. This finding has clear implications for how community colleges work to provide and encourage on-campus employment for students.

Results related to attending a religious service are less clear. Indeed, this behavior is positively associated with Civic Behavior and Civic Agency—which is logical given the high priority many religious organizations place on activism—but inversely related to Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. More study is required to better understand this finding and its implications.

Finally, community college student behaviors related to political engagement—including obtaining news regularly, registering to vote, voting in a student election, and voting in a local, state, or national election—are typically associated with greater Civic Behavior, Civic Capacity, Civic Agency, and Civic Knowledge. This reinforces scholarly perceptions that electoral participation can function as a gateway to more substantive forms of civic and democratic engagement (Mathews, 2016; McCartney et al., 2013; Ronan, 2011). Obtaining news regularly has a particularly strong association with greater Civic Capacity, which indicates that the more students seek to understand the world in which they live, the more likely they are to feel that they have the tools necessary to participate in a meaningful way. However, obtaining news regularly also has a small but significant *negative* association with Civic Behavior, which may be a function of students' busy lives. Interestingly, we also found small but significant negative associations between voting in a local, state, or national election and

students' Civic Capacity and Civic Knowledge. Although this finding deserves more study, it may be influenced by the very low voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds nationwide in the November 2014 election, the only one that occurred while all of our respondents were in college (New York Times Editorial Board, 2014).

Taken together, these results indicate that student behaviors in community college, both in the curriculum and the extra-curriculum, as well as certain community college characteristics such as institutional intentionality toward civic engagement, have powerful implications for the development of students' civic outcomes. Furthermore, this study suggests that those programs and practices that are intended to develop students' civic learning and democratic engagement—such as courses focused on inequality, racial/ethnic organizations, student elections, and so forth—are effective in doing so. Thus, the more community colleges work to establish policies and programs that encourage these behaviors, the more likely it is that their students will display the civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in a democratic society.

Limitations

As with most pilot studies, there are several inherent limitations to this research. First, despite research showing that "low-response rate administrations can provide reliable survey estimates" (Fosnacht, et al., in press, p. 12), a higher response rate would have reduced the potential for nonresponse bias. As well, given the commitment to civic engagement required of members of TDC, these results may be less generalizable to colleges where civic learning is not such a priority. Finally, although the sample was weighted to compensate for the fact that some community colleges produced many more respondents than others, results related to community college characteristics must be interpreted with some caution due to the small number of participating institutions. Many of these limitations will be addressed in future administrations of the survey, which will include a larger sample of TDC colleges and a greater number of respondents. This not only will introduce more variability into our analyses but will also allow us to utilize smaller random samples and more aggressive follow-up procedures.

Furthermore, future administrations of the civic outcomes survey in presidential election years—when voter turnout is typically much higher—will allow for a better understanding of the individual and institutional factors leading to greater electoral participation, as well as the relationship between voting and other civic outcomes. As this project matures, survey data will also be examined for its relationship to more traditional academic outcomes such as grade point averages and persistence and graduation rates. Such analyses will allow us to assess not only how an institutional focus on civic engagement leads to improved civic outcomes but also how it may contribute to students' ability to succeed in community college and beyond.

As well, although community college student behaviors are powerfully associated with civic outcomes—a finding that provides community colleges with much practical information about how they might work to improve civic outcomes—there exists a chicken-and-egg problem in interpreting the results, especially for those dependent variables for which there is no direct assessment of outcomes prior to entering community college. For example, does participating in a racial or ethnic organization lead to greater

Civic Capacity? Or does a strong sense of Civic Capacity drive students to join these types of organizations? A plausible argument can be made that students' behaviors lead to changes in the way they view themselves and their capacity to communicate with others and effect change (after all, this assumption underlies many tenets of teaching and learning, not to mention the field of behavioral psychology), but we cannot know this for sure.

Summary and Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that community colleges can and do play an important role in shaping students' civic lives. Take, for example, the fact that institutional intentionality toward civic engagement is related to higher levels of civic outcomes. This finding makes explicit the importance of referencing civic engagement in community college mission statements, strategic plans, and/or marketing materials; allocating financial resources for civic engagement; having a centralized infrastructure to manage civic initiatives; and so forth. In other words, administrative support for civic learning is critical to the development of students' civic outcomes and far more powerful than isolated civic offerings alone.

Similarly, the negative relationship between number of hours worked off-campus and all four civic outcomes—especially in light of the small but *positive* association between working on-campus and civic outcomes—highlights the importance of providing on-campus employment opportunities for students. That students who work on-campus are more likely to persist than those who work off-campus is not new information, as it is assumed that on-campus work can be considered *engagement*, whereas off-campus work takes students away from the connections and opportunities to be had on campus (Astin, 1993; Perna, 2010). However, this finding indicates that on-campus employment is associated with *both* academic and civic outcomes, which is a substantial contribution to the literature and should encourage community college efforts to provide students with work–study and other employment opportunities.

Finally, this study found that certain student behaviors in community college have powerful effects on their civic outcomes and that those programs and practices that are intended to develop civic learning and democratic engagement—student elections, courses focused on inequality, racial/ethnic organizations, and so forth—are effective in doing so. Although students may choose to engage in these behaviors without any sort of encouragement from the community college, one might assume that the provision of these opportunities, as well as institutional signals that these behaviors will be supported and rewarded, will result in the desired behavior by more students, and ultimately in greater civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge across the entire student body.

In the 21st century, simply admitting all comers—democratizing opportunity—is not sufficient to remedy the social inequities of our society. Community colleges must also help students develop the civic skills necessary to work toward positive change, both in their communities and in our nation as a whole. The results of this national pilot provide preliminary yet meaningful information about community college students' civic outcomes and—more importantly—the ways in which community colleges can influence students' civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge. Indeed,

the results of this study indicate that by making visible and measurable commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement on campus, and by creating opportunities for students to interact with one another, wrestle with thorny social or political issues, and engage in their communities, colleges can help create informed citizens who are skilled in democratic practices and committed to lifelong engagement. For community colleges, this is especially important, given their large population of students from groups historically marginalized in the nation's education and political systems and their mission to both democratize opportunity and *do the work of democracy*.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. Both the civic outcomes survey and the institutional questionnaire are publicly available at http://thedemocracycommitment.org/programs/the-civic-outcomes-of-community-colleges/the-civic-outcomes-of-community-colleges-survey-instruments/
2. To become a member of the Democracy Commitment, community colleges must make a public commitment to civic education, provide support for curricular and extracurricular civic programs, provide faculty and staff development related to civic engagement, and develop partnerships with local civic, non-profit, and governmental agencies.
3. For each of the dependent variables, Cronbach's alpha level of reliability ranged from .86 (Civic Agency, Civic Capacity) to .90 (Civic Knowledge, Civic Behavior).
4. The composite measure related to co-curricular focus on student engagement was ultimately removed from the analysis to resolve issues of multicollinearity.
5. Although the civic outcomes survey asks students about their pre-college civic behaviors, it does not attempt to assess their levels of civic agency, capacity, or knowledge prior to college. Thus, the only dependent variable for which non-demographic, pre-college information is available is Civic Behavior.

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