

# A Brief Review of the Evidence on Civic Learning in Higher Education

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Prepared by Ashley Finley, Ph.D  
Senior Director of Assessment and Research, AAC&U  
National Evaluator, Bringing Theory to Practice

**SIX ESSENTIAL FINDINGS ON STUDENTS' CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT:**

- **More than 70 percent of all college students report participating in some form of volunteering, community service, or service learning during their time in college.** (Source: *National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. 2012. A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.*)
- **About one-half of college students report participating in credit-bearing service learning activities during their time in college.** (Source: *National Survey of Student Engagement. 2010. NSSE 2010 Grand Frequencies by Major, First-Year Students and Seniors. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research; Data from the Higher Education Research Institute cited in O'Neill, Nancy. Forthcoming. Practices that Matter: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.*)
- **Dozens of studies show that service learning is positively associated with a variety of civic learning outcomes.** (Source: *Finley, Ashley. 2011. Civic Learning and Democratic Engagements: A Review of the Literature on Civic Engagement in Postsecondary Education. Unpublished paper. [http://www.civiclearning.org/SupportDocs/LiteratureReview\\_CivicEngagement\\_FinleyJuly2011.pdf](http://www.civiclearning.org/SupportDocs/LiteratureReview_CivicEngagement_FinleyJuly2011.pdf).)*
- **Emerging evidence suggests that the more frequently students participate in a continuum of civic learning practices (e.g. service learning, meaningful cross-racial interactions on campus or in classrooms, or real-world problem-based learning), the more they make gains on a variety of civic outcomes.** (Sources: *Blaich, C. and Wise, K. 2011. "Wabash National Study findings on Personal and Social Responsibility." Unpublished data provided by the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education; Bowen, Glenn. 2010. "Service-Learning in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Effective Practices." International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. 4(2): 1-15; Eyler, Janet S., Giles, Dwight E., Stenson, Christine M., Gray, Charlene J. 2001. At a Glance: What We Know about The Effects of Service-Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities, 1993-2000: Third Edition. Retrieved 10/12/10 from <http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/downloads/aag.pdf>); *Hurtado, Sylvia and DeAngelo, Linda. Forthcoming 2012. "Linking Diversity and Civic-Minded Practices with Student Outcomes: New Evidence from CIRP National Surveys." Liberal Education. 98 (2).*)*
- **Although over forty percent of all college students are enrolled at public two-year institutions, only about a quarter of these students report taking a course that included a service-learning experience.** (Source: *American Association of Community Colleges. 2011. "Fact Sheet"; Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE]. 2011. "Key Findings: Active and Collaborative Learning." Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Retrieved 11/9/11 from [http://www.ccsse.org/survey/bench\\_active.cfm](http://www.ccsse.org/survey/bench_active.cfm).)*
- **Despite a wealth of positive evidence related to service-learning experiences, findings on a range of civic measures and social responsibility outcomes compared over time suggest that students' civic learning is neither robust nor pervasive.** (Source: *Finley, Ashley. 2012. Making Progress? What We Know About the Achievement of Liberal Education Outcomes. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.*) → (see page 2)

**NEITHER ROBUST NOR PERVASIVE: THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF CIVIC LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Table 1. National Cohort Comparison of Seniors’ Self-Rated Change on Civic Outcomes Over Time\***

	Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) - Senior Survey		National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	
	2005	2010	2004	2010
<b>Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global</b>	Change since entering college in understanding of global issues: Much stronger 26.1%	Change since entering college in understanding of global issues: Much stronger 28.2%	Contributing to the welfare of your community: Very much 18%; Quite a bit 27%	Contributing to the welfare of your community: Very much 21%; Quite a bit 28%
	Since entering college have you frequently or occasionally worked on a local, state, or national campaign: 10.9%	Since entering college have you frequently or occasionally worked on a local, state, or national campaign: 12.2%	Voting in local, state, or national elections: Very much 9%; Quite a bit 14%	Voting in local, state, or national elections: Very much 14%; Quite a bit 19%
	Change since entering college in understanding of the problems facing your community: Much stronger 19.5%	Change since entering college in understanding of the problems facing your community: Much stronger 24.9%		
<b>Intercultural knowledge and competence</b>	Change since entering college in knowledge of people from different races/cultures: Much stronger 21.0%	Change since entering college in knowledge of people from different races/cultures: Much stronger 27.1%	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds: Very much 21%; Quite a bit 30%	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds: Very much 25%; Quite a bit 32%
<b>Ethical reasoning and action</b>			Developing a personal code of values and ethics: Very much 28%; Quite a bit, 31%	Developing a personal code of values and ethics: Very much 30%; Quite a bit 31%
<b>Foundations and skills for lifelong learning</b>			Learning effectively on your own: Very much 37%; Quite a bit 40%	Learning effectively on your own: Very much 36%; Quite a bit 39%

**Table 2. Students’ Developmental Change on Civic Outcomes from First-Year to Senior Year\***

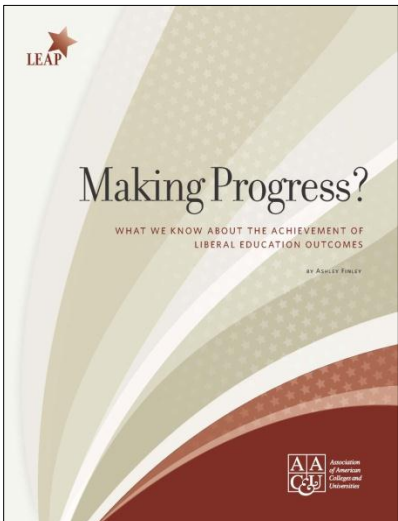
	Wabash National Study (2006-2010)
<b>Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global</b>	<p><b>Socially responsible leadership:</b>                      Moderate to High growth = 52%                      Small growth = 13%                      No growth or Decline = 35%</p> <p><b>Political and social involvement:</b>                      Moderate to High growth = 35%                      Small growth = 7%                      No growth or Decline = 58%</p>
<b>Intercultural knowledge and competence</b>	<p><b>Universality-diversity awareness:</b>                      Moderate to High growth = 42%                      Small growth = 11%                      No growth or Decline = 46%</p> <p><b>Openness to diversity and challenge:</b>                      Moderate to High growth = 31%                      Small growth = 8%                      No growth or Decline = 61%</p>
<b>Ethical reasoning and action</b>	<p><b>Moral reasoning:</b>                      Moderate to High growth = 62%                      Small growth = 11%                      No growth or Decline = 27%</p>

\*Source: Finley, Ashley. 2012. *Making Progress? What We Know About the Achievement of Liberal Education Outcomes*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

**FIVE AREAS IN WHICH MORE EVIDENCE ON CIVIC LEARNING IS URGENTLY NEEDED:**

- **Existing data on civic outcomes is almost entirely based on student self-reports of their behaviors, attitudes, and growth over time.** Multiple measures are needed to capture students' ability to demonstrate civic competencies.
- **There is scarce data on civic outcomes connected with the experiences of underserved students** (underrepresented minorities, first-generation, transfer, and low income); see for example *Brownell and Swaner. 2010. Five High Impact Practices: research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities*).
- **Greater evidence is needed on outcomes more closely associated with civic competencies or capacity building, particularly for success in an increasingly global and diversifying nation** (e.g. collaborative problem-solving, deliberative dialogue, teamwork).
- With the low percentages of students studying abroad, engaging in international experiences or taking international studies courses, **the development of outcomes or evidence related to global knowledge and skills is particularly thin**; see for example *Adelman, Clifford. 2004. "Global Preparedness of Pre-9/11 College Graduates: What the Longitudinal Studies Say." Tertiary Education and Management. 10: 243.*
- Though there is strong evidence linking civic learning experiences with improved rates of retention and completion, **greater evidence is needed on the ways in which variations in civic learning** (i.e. forms of practice and levels of intensity) **impact measures of student success.**

Forthcoming from AAC&U in late winter 2012...

	<p><b><i>Making Progress? What We Know about the Achievement of Liberal Education Outcomes</i></b> By Ashley Finley</p> <p>A follow-up to AAC&amp;U's <i>Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Student Achievement in College</i> (2005), <i>Making Progress?</i> provides an up-to-date overview of national data on the measurement of liberal education outcomes—including such outcomes as critical thinking, writing, and various outcomes related to civic learning, global competence, and social responsibility—and on students' progress in achieving them. This new report takes account of two especially important developments. First, it examines the conjunction of indirect data from student and faculty self-reports with direct assessment of learning, through national sources and specifically via the growing use of rubrics and e-portfolios. Second, it examines the evidence that certain "high-impact" educational practices increase learning gains by more deeply engaging students in the process of learning.</p>
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