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Teaching Democratic Citizenship: Theory versus Practice

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Teaching Democratic Citizenship: Theory versus Practice

Dr. Mary Hjelm
Dr. Chris Nesmith
University of South Carolina-Columbia
Classes began in 2008 with 16 students. Over 350 are currently enrolled and 68 graduates have completed degrees—40 more expected to graduate this spring. Students are largely non-traditional and place bound, as well as full-time employed, full-time students, and often have families.
USC Regional Campuses

- **USC Lancaster**
  Lancaster, Chester, Chesterfield, Kershaw, Fairfield, York.

- **USC Salkehatchie**
  Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, Hampton.

- **USC Sumter**
  Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Sumter, Williamsburg.

- **USC Union**
  Union and Laurens.
BLS curriculum

Independently designed program of study

Three focus areas

Three required courses:

- SC Studies
  - Interdisciplinary study of SC history, etc.
- Internship
- Capstone course
  - Interdisciplinary research project
Can responsible citizenship be taught?

- Plato—individual as part of state
- Dewey—schools as experiments in living democracy
- Freire—democratic education cannot be realized apart from an education of and for citizenship

“To learn democracy, students must do democracy.”

--Peter Goldmark, Rockefeller Foundation
Teaching Citizenship: approaches

- Civic republicanism
- Liberal humanism
- Critical citizenship
Engaged, Informed, and Participatory Citizens Project

Fall 2010 Cohort/ SC Studies Course Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, student will be able to:

- Identify what modern South Carolina is like today and what it may look like into the future
- Recognize the contribution of and participate in the activities of the state, such as the arts; education; local and state politics; and economics.
- Identify themselves as South Carolinians and place their education within the context of a modern, forward thinking South Carolina.
Our Research model: Pre- and Post Class Survey

Question 1: Do you Read the newspaper, either online or in print?
   Yes
   No

Question 2: How often?
   Never or hardly ever
   Once in a while
   Regularly, but not every day
   Every day or almost every day
Survey questions

- Have you ever written about a problem to a “problem solver”?
- Do you think someone actually reads your letters?
- Have you ever gotten a response?
- Would you write letters again?
- Do you consider yourself a good citizen? Why?
- Have you ever been a volunteer? Where? When? How long?
The classroom and the students

- PALM P493 assignments:
  - Reading Sunday newspaper and writing a response to it each week of semester
  - Writing two letters to “problem solvers” about SC issues
  - Weekly assessments of discussion, books, and guest speakers
Results: How often do you read the newspaper?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never/hardly ever 9.5%</td>
<td>Never/hardly ever 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in a while 38.1%</td>
<td>Once in while 14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly; not daily 33%</td>
<td>Regularly, not daily 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day or almost 19%</td>
<td>Every day or almost 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you find reading the newspaper to be of value beyond this class?

- Yes 83%
## Results: How often do you vote?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every election</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major elections</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some elections</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely or never</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Do you think your vote makes a difference?

Pre-test

- Yes 81%

Post-test

- Yes 87%

Do you identify yourself with a major political party?

- Yes 57%
- Yes 26%
Results: Have you written a letter?

Have you ever written a letter about a particular problem to a “problem-solver” (such as an elected official, public administrator, or CEO?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th></th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you write a similar letter again?

|          | Yes       | 38%   | Yes       |
|          | (100% of respondents) |       | 83% |
|          | Unanswered | 61%   | No        |
|          |           |       | Unanswered |
|          |           |       | 4%         |
|          |           |       | 4%         |
|          |           |       | 13%        |
Post-class Survey Results

- In addition to the required Sunday newspaper readings, have you read any other newspapers during the week?  65% Yes
Representative Explanations

- “I believe I am a good citizen because I do my part to help my city, state and nation progress, by voting, paying taxes, and staying involved.”
- “I believe I am a good citizen because I don’t get into any trouble…”
- “I keep up with what is going on in my state as well as our nation.”
Representative Responses

- “A good citizen is someone that looks out for the other people around them in both direct and indirect ways and tries to see to it that they and the others can live safer and more enriched/progressive lives.”
- “…I am more concerned with how it affects me and my friends and family. I am also concerned with issues that sometimes don’t pertain to me.”
- “…being a good citizen entails raising your voice and writing letters about issues you do not necessarily agree with.”
Post-class Survey Results

- Has your concept of what makes a “good citizen” changed over the course of the semester?
  - 52% Yes
Conclusions

- What we learned
  - We are making a difference
  - Need to include “citizenship” in vocabulary frequently and deliberately
  - No hidden agenda but deliberately causing citizenship to be at forefront of assignments, discussions, and readings
  - Changed some assignments to reflect what we are trying to achieve and to build an increased participation through the 3 required courses
Implications for further research

- How we will use it in curriculum development/ modification
  - Fall 2010 cohort is currently in the middle course, the internship, and involved in setting up parameters of site project/ community project
  - Will need to follow cohort through graduation
  - As new instructors teach this course, need to find means to assess outcomes
  - Post-graduation assessment?
For more information...

- Copies of the surveys used
- Bibliography of literature on the pedagogy of citizenship
- More information on Palmetto Programs

Please contact either of us at ….
Questions and Comments?

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Thank you