Measuring Citizenship Project

Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy

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Status Report
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Walt Whitman Center
for the Culture and Politics of Democracy
Issuing out of the success of the Civic Education and Community Service Program at Rutgers University, in 1992 the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy embarked on a measuring citizenship project to explore the relationship between community, citizenship, and service learning. The Project's main goal is to develop a working, empirical instrument that will measure the impact of service learning and other forms of civic experience on citizenship. This civic literacy test will determine how service learning and other civic experiences, such as jury service or military service, effect an individual's perceptions and commitments to his or her community.

The Measuring Citizenship Project includes a thirty member working group comprised of community activists and national experts from universities, service organizations, and foundations. (See Appendix A for members.) In the first year, the working group met in conference to formulate strong operational concepts for "community," "citizenship," and "democracy." Then, using these concepts the group laid a framework for the development of a civic literacy index. The instrument, in the form of a sophisticated but accessible questionnaire, will be used to measure the impact of a variety of civic learning experiences on attitudes and behaviors. We hope that this test can be used to evaluate many forms of civic education; most importantly perhaps, service learning, experiential education, and National Service.

The civic literacy test is being developed by a small Rutgers research team, advised by the larger working group and led by Dr. Barber, and includes nationally known educational psychologist Jeffrey Smith, New Jersey Center for Public Interest Polling Director Janice Ballou, and Project Director John Dedrick.

The Walt Whitman Center, with support from The Surdna Foundation, the Markle Foundation, and the National Commission on Community Service--which are collaborators in the Project's second year--are looking forward to continuing the second and third years of the project, during which time they plan to complete the civic literacy test and disseminate it nationally to a wide range of civic education and service learning projects, including the National Service Commission model programs.
While almost all civic literacy and civics tests have focused on cognitive knowledge (What is the First Amendment? Who is your Senator?), the instrument we are developing attempts to focus on attitude, affect, and behavior that contribute to active citizenship. We presume a model of active citizenship and test for the kinds of skills and understandings it demands. We have a preliminary version of the test which has been pre-tested at Rutgers University and with the Newark Summer of Service program. The results of our work will be discussed at our November working group meeting. Here are some sample questions:

**Participatory Orientation**

Below are several pairs of statements. Please circle the number next to the one statement in each pair that is closest to your opinion.

a. 1. Democratic politics works best when a few elected, strong leaders make the important decisions.
   OR
   2. Democratic politics works best when all citizens act as leaders.

b. 1. Elected representatives should make decisions based on what is best for all of their constituents.
   OR
   2. Elected representatives should do what the majority of their constituents tell them, even if the representative doesn't think it is the best decision.

**Sensitivity to Other Groups**

In the last year, how often have you felt that when you tried to explain an issue or problem to someone they did not understand or did not "get it" because they had not had the same ethnic, cultural, or gender experiences you have had? (Circle your response.)

1. never
2. one or two times
3. three to five times
4. six to ten times
5. more than ten times

In the last year, how often have you listened to someone explain an issue or problem they faced, and they felt that you did not understand or did not "get it" because you had not had the same ethnic, cultural, or gender experiences that they have had? (Circle your response.)

1. never
2. one or two times
3. three to five times
4. six to ten times
5. more than ten times
Civic Duty

The following is a list of activities. Please indicate whether you think each activity is a part of citizenship, and then indicate whether or not you think each of these activities should be required by law. (*Circle "1" for "yes" or "2" for "no".*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>This is a part of citizenship.</th>
<th>This should be required by law.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. register to vote</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. register for the draft</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. report for jury duty</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. pay taxes</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. pay attention to what goes on in government</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. volunteer for community service</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. give blood</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. pick up litter</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. car pool</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. recycle</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
<td>YES 1 NO 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Civic Participation

For each of the following statements, please circle the number that best represents how frequently you have done these things in the past five years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never 1</th>
<th>Occasionally 2</th>
<th>Regularly 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I vote in national elections.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I discuss local politics on a weekly basis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I speak at town meetings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I volunteer time to a civic organization.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. I write to newspapers to voice my views on an issue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. I talk about national politics with friends and relatives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. I participate in events in my community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fairness

Do you feel most laws are: (circle one)

1. fair to everyone
2. fair to most people
3. fair to some people
4. fair to only a few people

We hope the test can be taken in an hour or less and can be used with a number of audiences with various levels of education and skills. We obviously do not want to simply track SAT scores or limit ourselves to college educated respondents.

For more information about the Measuring Citizenship Project please call or write us at the Whitman Center:

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