



# CIVIC LEARNING

“Why do we need more than a vocational education? In part, because we live more than a vocational life: We live a larger civic life and we have to be educated for it” (Matthews, 1995, p. 70).

## CALL TO ACTION

**“[We] have laid the foundation for the next generation of commitments to educate for democracy. . . . The students are eager to lend a hand in addressing urgent social, economic, and political questions of the day that have public consequences. If we want a vigorous, participatory, and pluralist functioning democracy, the power to create the enabling educational environment “conducive to those ends” is available. It is time to act upon those transformative possibilities” (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012, p. 67).**

**We know “...little about students’ capacity to demonstrate their civic abilities in applied contexts.... This is the next frontier for researchers to truly understand the ways in which community based and civic practices contribute to students’ attainment of essential skills” (Chittum et al., 2022, p. 25).**



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# INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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The series *Contributions of Civic and Community Engagement in Higher Education* is produced by the Community of Practice, Inquiry, and Learning (COPIIL) of North Carolina Campus Engagement (formerly known as North Carolina Campus Compact). Focused on the benefits and value of civic and community engagement (CCE) in higher education, the series has two parts: (1) a Primer that provides an overview of each of 17 topical areas organized into three categories (priorities related to students, to institutions, and to communities) and that is designed as an accessible and evidence-based introduction to some of the key priorities that well-designed CCE can advance and (2) a set of more developed briefs in these 17 topical areas, intended to support ongoing exploration and inquiry in each of these areas and to guide ongoing deepening of practice.

Neither the Primer nor this set of topical briefs is comprehensive, but we do believe the topics included—selected through discussions within COPIIL and consultation with CCE thought leaders—are among the most relevant for this moment in the evolution of CCE and in our nation’s history. Neither the topics nor the work of CCE fit neatly into these categories; the topical priorities and the contributions of CCE to them are as deeply interwoven as the CCE work of community members, students, staff, and faculty is interdependent. The set of topical briefs may be expanded in the coming years as additional topics seem important to include and as additional practitioner-scholarship becomes available.

Each brief includes a summary of the topic and the role of higher education in general and CCE in particular in advancing it, an annotated list of associated scholarship, and a list of references and additional readings; quotes from students, alums, community members, faculty, staff, and literature related to CCE serve to concretize the possibilities and the stakes. Both components of the series incorporate examples from across the NC Campus Engagement network; descriptions of the examples draw on information available through campus websites and personal communication with key stakeholders.

NOTE: We use the term “civic and community engagement” to include many practices and pedagogies, including service-learning, community-engaged learning, election engagement, volunteerism, social entrepreneurship, community-based participatory research, social justice activism, and deliberative dialogue.

# OVERVIEW

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Long articulated as a central mission of higher education around the world, civic learning has come more to the forefront in the United States and globally in recent decades. Civic and community engagement (CCE) programs are often designed to teach students to take an active role in the life of democracy by focusing attention on developing informed perspectives on social issues, working through controversy with civility, and public problem-solving.

Civic learning is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of ways to express learning goals focused on the individual's role as a contributing member of communities. Chittum et al. (2022) defined civic as "related to an individual's role as a citizen and an agent of democracy" (p. 9). "[S]ocial responsibility, knowledge and skills for democracy, values clarification, moral development, public good, citizenship, democratic competences, sense of solidarity, ubuntu, commitment to and capacities to advance social justice, civic identity, cosmopolitan citizenship, life purpose, and global citizenship" are among the terms commonly articulated in civic learning frameworks (Bingle & Clayton, 2021, p. 1). "Civic learning empowers [students] to be actors rather than spectators in the processes that shape their own and others' lives, now and into the future" (Stokamer & Clayton, 2017, p. 45).

United Nations Special Rapporteur Singh's (2016) report on education highlights the importance of civic learning and calls on higher education institutions to help students "fully develop their own abilities with a sense of social responsibility, educating them to become full participants in democratic society and promoters of changes that will foster equity and justice" (para 109). Within the civic and community engagement field, specifically service-learning, civic learning is a crucial component (Bingle & Clayton, 2021; Bingle et al., 2015; Stokamer & Clayton, 2017). Chittum and colleagues (2022) built on the work of the 2012 National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement to note that while the use of high-impact practices, community-based and civic engagement, and research on them have expanded over the last decade, "research on the outcomes of community-based practices remains almost entirely based upon indirect or self-reported measures, and we need more evidence of students' demonstrated abilities related to these outcomes" (p. 24).

# ASSOCIATED SCHOLARSHIP

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- A meta-analysis of service-learning courses found that the pedagogy contributed to students' sense of social responsibility and connection with the community and their intentions to participate in the life of their communities (Eyler, 2011).
- Celio et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of precollegiate and collegiate students and found improvements in civic engagement and social skills associated with service-learning. Yorie and Ye (2012) found similar results in understanding social issues.
- A survey commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities confirmed that employers look for attributes such as the following in prospective employees: civic knowledge and skills, intercultural competence, problem-solving skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, understanding of cultural diversity, applied knowledge, ethical decision making, and critical thinking skills (Hart Research Associates, 2010).
- Curricular and co-curricular service-learning that integrate components of reflection, dialogue across differences, and informal dialogue with faculty and peers have been found to promote lasting civic outcomes in alumni, including civic-mindedness, civic action, and volunteering (Richard et al., 2016).
- Research by Chittum and colleagues (2022) found "service learning was associated with ... outcomes related to personal and social responsibility, such as increases in civic attitudes and civic mindedness, civic and community-based engagement, ... civic learning, a sense of civic responsibility, and ethical and moral reasoning" (p. 16).
- Reviewing 53 empirical studies Chittum and colleagues (2022) found that "community-based and civic engagement in higher education have positive outcomes across six key areas: increased personal and social responsibility, development of positive mindsets and dispositions, improved graduation and retention rates, learning gains, improved intellectual and practical skills, and increased career-related skills" (Executive Summary).

## UNC PEMBROKE

A service-learning course at UNC Pembroke helped students learn about—and raise awareness of—the conditions under which farm workers in rural North Carolina live. Students in the interdisciplinary capstone examined social issues related to the production and consumption of food through the eyes of migrant workers whose daily experience is deeply influenced by food systems and associated questions of justice: How, for example, can there be both plentiful food and food insecurity? Students also engaged with nonprofit organizations that work for justice on behalf of farmworkers and learned about how the United States' food systems impact individuals and societies from local to national scales; the project was also designed to help them improve teamwork skills and cultural sensitivity.

Students' final projects were presented at the Pembroke Undergraduate Research Symposium. One of the students expressed the connections between academic and civic learning this project generated: "This semester has actually helped influence my major. I've decided to go into public relations to help spread awareness of injustice that people face.... To be able to help make a difference in the world: this class has shown me that it is possible, even if we're doing small things."

**For additional information, contact UNC Pembroke's Office for Community and Civic Engagement.**

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# AUTHORS

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To learn more about COFIL please visit:

<https://nccampusengagement.org/community-of-practice-inquiry-and-learning-copil/>

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