Engaging Students in Lived Civics, the Social Contract & Public Life

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Abstract

Civic education has been both the target of many, aiming to empower youth to become powerfully informed and actively engaged, and a long running source of frustration regarding the lack of courses in higher education designed beyond civic knowledge. With that in mind, we have created an innovative design for a civics course, that is interdisciplinary, experiential, and rooted in both political theory and the lived experiences of students. Our course is designed to directly contribute to meaningful dialogue, community building, and civic engagement that is both timeless, and also particularly timely in our current polarized and partisan era. This paper outlines the rationale, pedological approach, theoretical support, and resources involved in developing in implementing our course. The course was developed over a two-year period with substantial input from faculty around our university, supported with a grant from the Teagle Foundation, and taught for the first time in the fall of 2022.

Our course aims to provide the groundwork for embracing, challenging, and grappling with the important and contentious issues that lie at the heart of American contemporary civic culture and democratic life. We have designed our course to do this through both theory and skill building. Theoretically we root this course in active discussion and interrogation of the social contract in the United States, examining the implicit agreement among members of a society to follow certain rules in exchange for the benefits of living together. Moving to the personal and practical skill building, the course centers the lives of students through the "lived civics" approach, which embraces the experiences of each student in their various communities as examples of civic knowledge and valuable experience. The lived civics approach also centers the experiences of people and communities that have often been left out of civic education curricula historically. Together, these foundational building blocks are used to explore key tensions within American political and civic life, along with historical context and founding documents.

The design of this course is unique in a number of ways, but it is notably built on a flexible structure that is designed to teach and explore civics through an interdisciplinary approach. While all sections of the course share foundational elements, instructors will tailor the application of this course material to their areas of expertise. Students will gain knowledge and skills, including engaging in what we call "courageous conversations," and empathetic listening, to help them participate in thoughtful dialogue around meaningful and often controversial topics and empower them to be more active members of their communities. The interdisciplinary nature of the course also contributes to a community of teacher-scholars, dedicated to quality civic education, that can emerge and grow within the college or university.

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Introduction:

It has become almost cliche to declare that American civic life is under threat, but this makes it no less true. While there are many ways that political science can help address the issues facing our democracy, perhaps the clearest, most obvious one involves reinvesting in civic education. So, in 2022, with generous funding from the Teagle Foundation, we developed an innovative interdisciplinary civics curriculum to engage students in how to live together in political and social communities, by focusing on how to communicate, listen, share ideas, trust good information and to collectively engage in the study of American historical and contemporary political life. This paper explains our approach, the outcomes from our initial implementation, the challenges and successes that we have experienced along the way, and the potential applications of this curriculum in classrooms around the nation.

We are living in a remarkable time in the history of American democracy. More than at any point in recent generations, we are witnessing extreme polarization (DeJong, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2021); increasingly complex and highly segmented news, entertainment, and social media, and public instances of animosity, incivility, and violence in our communities and nation. Due to misinformation and disinformation, Americans cannot agree on fundamental facts like the safety and efficacy of vaccines, or who won the 2020 Presidential Election (Dimock, 2020). The social-media culture in which an individual's ideas are reinforced by narrow interactions with like-minded people both reflects and contributes to real-life segregation, as Americans continue to sort themselves into neighborhoods and communities with homogenous worldviews (Bishop, 2009). Many Americans are antagonistic toward those with whom they disagree and fearful of even engaging in dialogue. In a recent Pew survey, over 80% of Trump and Biden voters said they have few or no friends who supported the opposition candidate (Pew Research Center, 2020). Higher

education, a place that should encourage the free exchange of ideas and allow for diversity of viewpoints, is not immune to these trends. Recent incoming student cohorts are the most politically polarized in a half-century (Donachie, 2017).

Background Context & Rationale

This turbulence in public life has spawned a renewed debate about what it means to be part of our shared community and prompts urgent questions about the contours of the American social contract. What are our obligations to others in times of economic and social upheaval? What does it mean to actively participate in a social contract that includes living with, by, and under rules, regulations, and values that we may believe are wrong or misguided? How do we understand the role of power (and the unequal distribution of it) in this process? How do we seek justice within these power relations? What responsibility do we even have to participate in decision making? What role should attention to the common good play? What lessons can we learn from history?

These difficult questions are made even more so by the inability of disparate parties to come together, or even to acknowledge the potential of others' realities. We see this at all levels of government, and in organizations, with hostile interactions mediated and amplified through social media, with calls to "cancel" the opposition, or conversely to claim one is the victim of "cancel culture."

Changes in education, some well-intended, helped to foster this toxic dynamic in the first place. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 aimed to increase accountability in schools by mandating systematic testing of students' reading and math skills. Subsequent legislation, such as the STEM Education Act of 2015, reflected a growing prioritization for science and math (Zubrzycki, 2015).

One consequence of these trends has been a turning away from social studies, history and civics in K-12 education (Levine et al., 2004, Kalaidis, 2013), best exemplified in the 1000 to 1 disparity in annual federal funding for STEM education at fifty-four dollars per student, versus civic education at five cents per student (Adams, 2019).

Another especially pernicious deficiency is what researchers have termed the "civic opportunity gap," in which Black, Brown and low-income students are much less likely than their white and wealthier peers to receive high quality civic education (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017; Levinson, 2010). In recent years, some states have begun to address this gap by requiring a civics course for high school graduation (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). In Illinois, for instance, a law mandating civic instruction was implemented for the 2016-17 school year. However, this remains a patchwork effort, with courses fashioned as comprehension tests of the US Constitution, and much less attention paid to the profound issues, democratic complexities, and difficult conversations necessary to build thoughtful, engaged, and empathetic citizens (e.g., McAvoy, Fine & Herrara Ward, 2016).

Civic education itself has now become hostage to the very forces it seeks to mediate, with some parts of the country focusing on elevating marginalized voices in the teaching of civics, and others explicitly rejecting this approach. As of May 2021, 16 states have introduced or passed legislation to limit what can be taught in K-12 schools, mainly focusing on issues of race and history. One pending civic education bill in Texas removes the requirement to teach students about anything likely to make them "feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex" (Lindell, 2021). Increasingly those battles have extended to what books should be allowed in K-12 schools. These concerns have often centered on books that

have been written on the themes of race, gender, sexuality, and U.S. history. In the 2021-2022 school year alone, over 2,500 books were banned, affecting nearly 4 million students, in districts spanning 32 states, with numbers growing in the 2022-2023 school year (Yurcaba, 2022). As a result, at DePaul, as with many higher education institutions, students' civic education varies widely, with many entering with little or no knowledge of basic facts of American government and public life, a trend that is likely to continue into the future.

Fortunately, there is already growing consensus around the need to redouble the investment in, and rigor of, civics education. One high profile example is the Educating for American Democracy (2021) initiative, which "involved a diverse collaboration among over 300 academics, historians, political scientists, K–12 educators, district and state administrators, civics providers, students, and others from across the country" to develop a range of resources for educators to support the teaching of a historically-informed civics curriculum that acknowledges and even celebrates the role of compromise in democracy. The National Academy of Education recently released "Educating for Reasoning and Civic Discourse," which provides guidelines and research-based practices for a reinvigoration and reinvestment in civics (Lee et al., 2021). Even Congress has attempted to address the problem through the bi-partisan Civics Secures Democracy Act, which proposes a dramatic increase in our federal investment in civic education. Many of these initiatives, as well as disparate state-wide efforts, build on research that documents the relationship between civic instruction in high school and subsequent political engagement among adults (c.f, Neundorf, et al., 2016; Torney-Purta, 2002; Zukin, et al., 2006).

Lived Civics, the Social Contract & Public Life

Our project attempts to renew and reinvigorate civic education, with a particular focus on higher education, to which less attention has been paid. Our first step is the development of a course, Lived Civics, the Social Contract & Public Life, designed to build civic skills, historical knowledge and democratic dispositions among college students using the lens of the social contract as a framework for discussing our differences. A key element of the course is that while there is shared content across sections, each course offering is also unique, reflecting the disciplinary expertise of the instructor.

The course differs substantially from traditional civic education such as AP Government or introductory US political science courses, which typically focus on mastering political knowledge, rarely provide opportunities for students to practice the habits of political engagement, and are often completely disconnected from the local context (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). We argue that the act of discourse itself, informed by a Lived Civics approach that has students reflect upon their civic experiences in home communities as key points of departure, is the best way to catalyze students to rigorously interrogate the social contract, acknowledge differences, and practice the democratic skills of listening and deliberation. For this current youth generation, commonly called Generation Z (born between 1995 – 2010), such democratic practices are both facilitated and challenged by the new forms of social interaction native to them – social media, online communities, and the roles therein – and the challenge of differentiating substantive engagement from superficial performance.

Generations are formed by the unique interaction of age and experiences that occur during young adulthood, known as the "impressionable years" (Delli Carpini, 1989, Jennings & Niemi, 1981, Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). When social, economic or political events are significant enough to shape a cohort of individuals into a generation, it imbues them with a "characteristic type of historically

relevant action" (Mannheim, 1928/1952: 290). Because of COVID-19, this generation has experienced a dramatic social and economic reordering of public life and constraints on liberty, and attendant reaction to those changes – a true test of the social contract between the government and the governed. They have witnessed or participated in protests around the proper use of police power in communities of color, extreme partisan polarization, increasing political violence, as well as on-going challenges to the legitimacy of our democratic process, most notably in the January 6 attack on the United States Capitol. Their generation will be indelibly marked by these events. We aim to offer them the tools to place these upheavals in historical, philosophical, and geographical context, and to help them to jointly find a way forward by engaging in productive disagreement and debate.

Our project is distinct in that it brings a place-based approach to students' understanding of their role in civic life. As Rubin and Hayes argue, "many civic education practices are structured as though all students draw on an identical well of experience to make sense of the curriculum" (2010, 353), when, on the contrary, individuals experience very different civic realities depending on where they live. The Lived Civics approach provides a lens through which students can reflect on their daily experiences as *civic experiences* – and thus allows them to engage with others whose civic identities have had very different influences (Cohen, et al., 2018).

Purpose & Goals

Our curriculum is grounded in the central theme of the social contract, but utilizes the dual pedagogical approaches of contentious debates and Lived Civics. Highlighting contentious debates around the values, orientations, and outcomes inherent in negotiating the social contract provides an opportunity to teach students the critical democratic skills of listening and discussion. The Lived

Civics approach makes these debates meaningful, tangible and personally relevant for students and helps them understand their own roles within, and obligations to, their communities.

The social contract, as a conceptual theme, is central to understanding civic society because it captures the notion that political rules, legislative decisions and policy outcomes reflect choices we make about individual and community values. As political scientist David Easton (1965) argues, politics serves as "the authoritative allocation of value" through which individuals interact with institutions, norms, and each other to make decisions about how to govern ourselves. From the decision to allow and protect slavery at the founding, to the creation of the welfare state in the nineteenth century, to contemporary debates about free speech and the place of information in the digital age, Americans have debated, constructed, and redefined the social contract to both expand and limit the freedom, rights, and expression of various parts of the body politic, including their very participation in democratic processes.

During our planning phase, we piloted elements of the social contract curriculum in four different courses, including classes in Geography, Political Science, Education, and Religious Studies. Faculty briefly introduced students to the concept of the social contract and then applied them to discipline-specific public policy issues. Some students had a general knowledge of the concept prior to their specific courses, and others understood the theory as provided. However, nearly all struggled *to apply* the social contract to specific issue areas. This finding was instrumental in shaping our curriculum design to include scaffolded opportunities for students to apply the concept to both historical and contemporary situations. We detail specific ways we plan to achieve these goals in the Major Components and Activities section below.

The Contentious Debates Approach

One of our two primary approaches used to engage students is through studying the contentious debates and negotiation that surround the creation and evolving interpretations and debates around core American values and the social contract. This teaches students that debate and disagreement, as well as the imperfect resolution of diverse perspectives, has been a central element of civic life in the United States since its founding, and is in fact foundational to the American civic project. The various sections of this curriculum will trace the historical evolution of these debates, reading the Constitution as an attempt to create a document that was a product of political and philosophical compromise and trade-offs, rather than consensus. They will emphasize that regional economic and cultural differences, as well as the values implicit and explicit in the Constitution, are key to understanding the development of the federalist form of government in the United States. And, importantly, students in these classes will explore how the political system has both included and excluded segments of its changing population over time, and how this experience continues to impact the civic experiences of the diverse American society of today. This provides a reflective framework for evaluating contemporary hyper-partisanship and polarization. Students will grapple with the question: Do the key values that constitute American civic life offer a source of unity and consensus, or is our political community defined by its forms and practices of diversity and disagreement? Or both? The curriculum will provide students with a framework for evaluating the ways that past generations have navigated contests over values, differentiating these from disagreements over facts.

In emphasizing the historical context of political debates, we aim to counter a strain of contemporary public discourse that posits disagreement and difference as *the essential problem* in our politics and civic life, rather than a necessary feature of it. Compromise, in such a view, is evidence

of a lack of integrity or betrayal. We argue that the problem is rather that negotiations are too often conducted in bad faith, and the opposing sides are rewarded for not listening to each other. As members of a shared community we need, as Danielle Allen (2004) urges, for students to learn to talk to those with whom they differ. Toward this aim, faculty will be given resources and instruction on how to foster productive, civil discussions and debate around contentious issues, and empathetic listening, as not only a means to an end but as a set of skills necessary for engaged civic life.

The Lived Civics Approach

In the Lived Civics approach, classes are "open to and structured around the many ways, some positive and some negative, young people engage with the political and civic world that surrounds them. With an emphasis on identities such as race, ethnicity and class, both students and educators are positioned as experts and learners" (Cohen, et al., 2018). The approach acknowledges that students' real-life, shared experiences and their community-based knowledge are the entryway for civics instruction and cannot be separated from their learning. Although they might not label it as such, students are experiencing civics in their daily lives and, as Rubin & Hayes (2010) explain, "these (civic) experiences may differ sharply depending on how students are situated socially, historically, and culturally amid the institutional structures of the United States" (354). Whether one is a Black youth in Chicago interacting with police, a first generation Latinx student whose parents immigrated to rural Iowa, an Appalachian teen watching one's community destroyed by opiates, or a privileged suburbanite who may have experienced relatively few structural challenges, one has inherent values and perspectives that must be acknowledged in order for a robust learning community to be established.

At DePaul, we are in a unique position. We often say that DePaul's campus is the city of Chicago, and the city is remarkably diverse. Few large, private universities draw from Latinx, Black, immigrant, suburban, and rural Midwestern communities of such wide-ranging socio-economic status. While DePaul students come to Chicago from every state and dozens of countries around the world, our student body is Chicago-centric. Well over 60 percent of DePaul students come from Illinois, the majority of which come from Chicago or its suburbs. Moreover, DePaul is one of Illinois' top destinations for transfer students, the vast majority of whom come from the Chicago area. DePaul students also live throughout the Chicagoland area, with only one percent of students living on campus; the balance live near our two main campuses or commute from across the metropolitan area. Wherever they are from, their experiences in and around Chicago are as varied as the city itself.

Purposefully reflecting about place provides a framework within which students can think about the founding documents and how the debates at that time were also structured by place, in ways that may seem at once familiar and radically dissimilar to their own. Moreover, in pairing the framework of the social contract with a Lived Civics approach that centers place, our course allows students to recognize themselves and their communities in the core texts (e.g., Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau) and related critiques of the social contract (e.g., Mills, 1999; Pateman, 1988; Sungmoon, 2014; Wilde, 2003; Revkin & Ahram, 2020; Keating, 2011). In their interrogation of these texts, students will build a *shared* language and framework, and the community that is created by this shared vocabulary will endeavor to create a learning environment in which they can find commonalities among the diverse perspectives of their classmates, despite these very real differences in experience and perspective.

Major Components & Activities

As explained above, the Lived Civics, Social Contract & Public Life curriculum aims to provide the groundwork for grappling with the contentious and significant issues that lie at the heart of our contemporary civic culture and democratic life through an interrogation of the social contract grounded in an examination of the historical development of the American republic. This interdisciplinary course contains a shared core component across all sections, as well as individualized, instructor-chosen modules designed to be disciplinarily diverse.

The sequence of each section of Lived Civics, the Social Contract, and Public Life is as follows:

- Drawing on the Lived Civics approach, students begin by identifying their experiences in civic society and the challenges facing their home and current communities, whether local, global, or digital. Gaining insights into the degree to which place shapes civic experiences in our home communities, and within the university, promises to make this exercise meaningful for local students as well as transplants.
- Instructors introduce social contract theory and associated criticism. Students read original texts from Hobbes, Locke & Rousseau; and criticism from scholars such as Mills (1999) and Pateman (1998) and non-western thinkers (e.g., Sungmoon, 2014; Revkin & Ahram, 2020). Students develop a shared understanding (and associated vocabulary) of the social contract, and revisit the issues raised in the first part of the course using the social contract frame.
- Instructors guide students in the identification of issues by introducing two key tensions in the social contract: 1) the good of the one vs. the good of the many, and 2) rights vs. responsibilities. Classes use these two key tensions to explore critical issues in American political history and contemporary America, such as the founding, federalism, the Civil War

& Reconstruction, the New Deal, and the Covid-19 Pandemic. We have curated a range of resources (texts and media) for instructors to employ and adapt in their classrooms.

- Instructors build in activities and instruction around how to engage in civic discourse, through what we call courageous conversations. These skills and activities include building shared classroom agreements and vocabulary, empathetic listening, and conscientious discussions and activities designed to show how this work can help individuals grow in their capacity for engaged civic life.
- The final part of the course is discipline specific by section. Instructors will explore the tensions inherent in social contract theory and its lived reality in American civic life by applying it to their own discipline, encapsulated in a project that explores the social contract through the lens of that discipline, with attention to place as a key element of their instruction. For example, an art historian might ask students to examine ways in which these tensions can be observed in American paintings—demonstrating the way that public art communicated the tensions of the social contract. A geographer could ask students to analyze maps of redlining in Chicago to illustrate the uneven availability of the social contract to all citizens. A political scientist might design projects in which students evaluate the First Amendment right to freedom of speech in the era of social media. An education professor could ask students to evaluate the uneven and varied funding of public schools, locally or nationally. Flexibility will be a key component to the interdisciplinary nature of this course being taught across the university.

Faculty in our focus groups were in broad agreement that most students today lack the skills for engaging with each other (and with the professor) across difference. Faculty also articulated the need for practice and guidance in developing such skills, often struggling when the polarization of the

country is replicated in their classrooms (Fournier-Sylvester, 2013). A key component of our program, therefore, includes training faculty in the best practices for facilitating these types of discussions and providing robust support during the course and afterwards. We detail these elements below.

Learning Outcomes for Lived Civics, The Social Contract & Public Life

The design of the curriculum, and the associated Learning Outcomes, are deeply grounded in learning theory and empirical research. Each section is structured to reflect Kolb's (1984) four stages of learning theory: students begin with a "concrete experience" identified by the Lived Civics framework. They work through the second and third stages when faculty ask them to reflect on these experiences using the two key tensions and then apply those to the social contract theory. In the fourth stage they apply the abstract concepts and generalizations of the social contract to new areas, both with the instructor and on their own. Research shows that for students to learn skills and gain understanding of key concepts, they must practice them, apply them in multiple contexts, and repeat this practice across time (cf., National Academies, 2018).

In addition to the benefits of the Lived Civics approach detailed above, there is significant evidence that allowing student choice in the classroom boosts student engagement and learning (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Scholars have demonstrated that an inclusive classroom community is linked to positive student outcomes (Jagger, 2013; Reyes, et al., 2012) and connected discussions of controversial issues among youth to adult civic engagement (McDevitt and Kiousis, 2006).

We have intentionally included skills of listening and discussion along with the substantive knowledge and skills of application. Research has documented the importance of discussing

controversial issues in the classroom (e.g., Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Lee, et al., 2021) and the positive outcomes associated with these practices. Several political theorists have emphasized the crucial role that listening plays in our democracy (Dobson 2014, Allen, 2004) and recent scholarship has provided evidence that an emphasis on listening in the classroom is similarly vital. When students are provided with opportunities to listen empathically to each other they report valuing new perspectives, gaining empathy, developing understanding, deepening their sense of connection and trust, and in some cases changing their perspectives. (Andolina & Conklin, 2021). These are skills that will serve students well in their post-college lives as citizens and actors in their own workplaces and communities.

The design of the curriculum is structured to support the following learning objectives:

- Students will evaluate and situate their place in American civic life, their home communities, and their shared community in Chicago.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of social contract theory, including political philosophers, core texts, and criticism from both western and non-western theorists.
- Students will be able to critically evaluate key events in American political history, and contemporary America using the framework of social contract theory.
- Students will be able to analyze the inequality and diversity of experience that is a result of how the social contract has been implemented in American life.
- Students will be able to apply the tenets of social contract theory to an issue in a format that can be shared in a public forum.
- Students will develop skills of listening and discussion that foster thoughtful and civil engagement with others on contentious topics.

- Students will be able to better understand the role of place in shaping them as civic individuals and in how their current communities create new obligations, values, concerns, and conflicts.
- Students will recognize that navigating these tensions, between the culture, economics and politics of the communities with which they engage, is part of a key tension recognized by our nation's founders.

Pedagogical Training and Instructional Design

In order to encourage faculty participation, particularly for those from disciplines that are not traditionally associated with this subject matter, a critical element of our Civics Initiative revolves around professional development. Instructors received support for teaching the social contract, and pedagogical guidance on how to lead discussions about difficult topics and the Lived Civics approach. This is particularly crucial given the ad-hoc communities which classrooms create.

The central mechanism for providing this training is an annual two-day Summer Civics Institute in which participants were provided with an overview of the course goals; sample lessons; access to primary and secondary materials and resources; instruction on facilitating difficult classroom conversations; and one-on-one assistance in developing their individual sections of LSP 275.

Specific components of pedagogical training and support included:

- Working closely with DePaul's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to help us design the Summer Civics Institute and to provide faculty with individualized instructional design and development assistance.

- Throughout the academic year, LSP 275 instructors received ongoing support from CTL as well as the lead faculty and participated in two half-day follow-up sessions.
- A curated library of civics resources for LSP 275 instructors, including recommended texts and media for use in their courses, as well as a shared syllabus and lesson plan archive.

This project required considerable investment in the human resources necessary to implement this course university-wide, recognizing the complexities required for designing a curriculum to be used and adapted across the university, colleges, and disciplines. In addition to support for the two lead faculty in terms of release time; we hired part-time support staff (provided by undergraduate and graduate student workers); recruited external and internal experts on teaching and learning who contributed directly or indirectly to the Summer Civics Institute; and provided participant incentives for faculty to agree to invest the time and energy to develop sections of the course on an annual basis, as well as the time and effort of personnel from CTL.

Our emphasis on instructional design and support emerged organically from the focus groups we conducted with faculty across the university during our planning phase. These conversations included faculty from the College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, along with faculty from the colleges of Law, Education, Business, Theatre, Computing & Digital Media, and Communications. Faculty spoke about their commitment to issues associated with the social contract and civics, but expressed hesitancy about their ability to teach outside their discipline. They shared their earnest desire to facilitate conversations on controversial topics but wariness about their ability to do so.

Many faculty in higher education have little to no formal pedagogical training, much less structured guidance. We aimed to support both of these needs in helping instructors learn pedagogical skills to facilitate meaningful discussions in class through our Summer Civics Institute, along with ongoing support, resources, and guidance from experts in civics pedagogy.

We were supported in this effort with training from Mikva Challenge, a Chicago-based, national non-profit organization that provides civic education and support to educators in middle and high schools throughout the nation. DePaul purchased access to Mikva's curricular materials and Mikva's Chief Education Officer, Jill Bass, provided individualized training for our lead faculty on how to build community and lead "courageous conversations" Their resources and guidance were instrumental in how we support our community to lead courageous conversations, through engaged activities, skill building, and exercises to promote both sharing experiences and practicing empathetic listening.

Many of the resources we collected and curated were from publicly available civics education organizations, such as iCivics, the Annenberg Public Policy Center, Illinois Civics Hub, Center for Civic Education, Facing History and Ourselves, and Educating for American Democracy, among others. Because we want these resources to be available for anyone interested in civic education resources, regardless of their DePaul affiliation, we are currently working to include these materials on our DePaul Civics Initiative website.

Assessment of Student Learning & Project Success

Civic life is rooted in thoughtful understanding of information and discourse, often directed toward political or policy goals. Therefore, we plan to assess students not only for their understanding of

core concepts and their grasp of key historical facts, but also for their ability to communicate with and listen to one another. Course-related assessments included in-class discussions, short papers, vocabulary assignments, and a longer, integrative take-home exam. Students were evaluated (and graded) on their ability to provide thoughtful, evidence-based arguments, but also on the ways in which they engage with each other in meaningful debate, collaborative work, or as attentive listeners.

Our assessment of the effectiveness of the curriculum will include both qualitative and quantitative data from students as well as feedback from faculty. In additional to the traditional metrics included in end-of-quarter Online Teaching Evaluations (OTEs) that all students complete, we added some course-specific closed-ended and open ended questions. At this point, we only have a small number of respondents from the first section of the course, however, all indicators are positive. Overall, looking at the standard questions, the students evaluated the class highly, (4.8 on a five point scale), with all students rating all of the following as "excellent" (5/5): "the usefulness of the readings and/or related materials;" "the instructor's willingness to consider each student's opinions or interpretations;" and the instructor herself, among others.

The LSP 275 specific questions contained additional positive feedback. For example, we asked students to reflect on their understanding of the social contract as a concept. Students were mixed in their assessment of their own knowledge prior to taking the class. But 100% "strongly agreed" that, after taking the course, they have "a good idea of what the social contract meant and how it applies to contemporary life." In addition, the class reported a mean of 4.8 (on a five point scale) when asked if the "class helped [you] develop skills of listening and discussion that foster thoughtful and civil engagement with others on contentious topics."

When asked what was the most important lesson of the class, students responded to both the substance and the skills. One stated their greatest lesson was "the understanding needed when talking to people with different perspectives," while another noted that their takeaway was "that civics exist all around us in every aspect of our lives." Others focused on the social contract, noting that they learned how to "identify how the concepts of the social contract are applied in today's society" and another commented that "I also learned how the newer generations have the ability to create a social contract, one which will include everyone into in it and express everyone's views."

Students also responded positively to the Lived Civics framework and the emphasis on contentious debates. They praised the opportunity to have "open and honest" discussions and remarked about learning from their peers' experiences. We will continue to include these LSP 275 specific questions in all the end-of-quarter online course evaluations.

The enthusiasm in the student evaluations matched informal assessments of student engagement throughout the quarter. Students appeared genuinely interested in both the material and the process. At one point, after reading a Danielle Allen essay about a "Forgotten Black Founding Father," one student commented, "I never cared about the early history of the US because I thought it didn't apply to me, but now I see myself in that history."

In addition to informal and formal feedback from students, we planned two half-day follow-up sessions with our faculty instructors for their insight into lesson design, resources, implementation, and student learning. Although none have completed teaching the course at the time of this writing, one instructor mentioned using lessons from the Summer Institute in her other courses, indicating the broad applicability of the pedagogy.

Dissemination

Significant components of the project and the curriculum will be publicly available to higher and secondary education teachers and leadership through a website that will host shareable instructional materials, syllabi, readings and resources, sample student projects, and professional development strategies. This resource will grow over time. Initial formation will center on the resources for the course itself, including core texts and supplemental resources and media that could be used by faculty across various disciplines. Pedagogical tools and resources will be added during the first summer institute and supplemented in subsequent years.

Challenges

There are a number of challenges to both creating and building a community dedicated to an interdisciplinary approach to civic education. Faculty recruitment and implementation presented some difficulties. In some faculty applications, it was clear that faculty were interested because they had a course they already wanted to teach, not that they wanted to learn how to teach a new course. In addition, in convincing faculty to teach a course centered on a subject in which they are not formally trained we were met with trepidation, if not outright resistance. We also struggled with the challenge of life in higher education – one faculty member no longer teaching full time, another two could not convince their home units to schedule their section of the course for the first year, which meant that we were not able to offer as many sections as we had hoped. In addition, the support staff involves a cost of time and money that some colleges and universities may not have. We were fortunate to recruit fabulous students – one with subject knowledge expertise and another with user interface expertise. These student team members were absolutely critical to our success. Finally the goals of this project are ambitious and some aspects, like quarter-long student projects, were just too

much to implement in the first year. Faculty needed time to teach the class and become comfortable with the project, learning outcomes, and (for some) new ways of teaching.

Next Steps

In the first year of our program development, we recruited a small cohort of 10 faculty to participate in the Summer Institute. In the second and third years, we plan to increase (to 20 and then 30) the cohort size. We hope to have two alumni from the first group to serve as faculty mentors to the second and third cohorts. These faculty mentors will support the two lead faculty in delivering the program and provide professional support to participants as they design their own sections of the course. By investing in the time and expertise of "graduates" of the faculty training program, we hope to further institutionalize our civics curriculum by building a learning community of faculty that can continue to provide informal support and mentorship to one another long after the grant period has ended.

We also plan on further development of student assessment including final projects in which students evaluate an issue, event, document, art, or other media through the lens of the social contract. Students in a specific iteration of an LSP 275 course taught by a geographer might analyze an aspect of urban policy and planning to assess the lived reality of the social contract as a manifestation of the urban landscape. A business professor might develop LSP 275 to evaluate the standard Chicago rental contract from the perspective of the social contract. These projects – which could take the form of posters, maps, videos, or other forms of presentation – will serve several purposes, including providing an opportunity for students, with faculty guidance, to apply theory, a key element in the four stages of learning discussed earlier. Students will share these projects in a colloquium each spring, which will allow them to observe the breadth of topics to which the social

contract is applied. These events could be collected and catalogued and made available to the broader community.

In addition, we plan to have LSP 275 serve as the foundational course for the development of a larger certificate program, which will pair this course with other classes across the university. Students who are interested in the topic – and who want to demonstrate their skills to potential employers – can choose from a selection of classes that reflect both the relevance and diversity of civics across the curriculum.

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