

SoTL and Civic Engagement at Illinois State University (ISU): A Documentary Film Project

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Civic Engagement (CE) has been infused into the curriculum at Illinois State University resulting in various project-based student experiences each semester. Three years ago ISU began a systematic strategy to infuse CE where possible throughout the campus. Faculty members were trained through workshops, curriculum was changed, student-learning outcomes were assessed, and a new interdisciplinary minor of “Civic Engagement and Responsibility” was created. Related to these efforts, the final phase of our participation in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) was to encourage and support SoTL on the learning outcomes related to student participation in civic engagement and similar (e.g., service learning) experiences. Over the last three yearsⁱ, the CASTL team has, for example, conducted a campus survey on civic engagement and SoTL, offered multiple workshops on SoTL and civic engagement, supported nine internal small SoTL on CE grants (totaling over \$40,000), and held “Student-Faculty Conversation on Learning: Learning Outcomes from Involvement in Registered Student Organizations.” ISU undergraduate or graduate students have been involved in the survey, all grants, the workshops, and the conversation on learning.

This fall, a video production team will begin documenting ISU CE projects and will conduct focus groups with a sample of participating students to discuss and describe the nature of their experience.ⁱⁱ The video product will become an integrated documentary exploring about five cases of CE with a reflective discussion from among student participants. This SoTL project’s goal is to investigate the student CE experience and learning outcomes. The impact of CE participation will be explored through discussion with students about their self awareness, understanding of diversity, understanding of democracy, ability to think critically about social issues, and ideas about the integration of service, societal issues and coursework. The documentary will also explore the students’ perspective about the value of CE project participation and what learning occurred for the student in the process. Led by School of Communication Assistant Professor and Emmy-award winning producer, Dr. Maria A. Moore, the production team will include graduate and undergraduate students from the School of Communication and will be overseen by the Cross Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Professor of Sociology, Dr. Kathleen McKinney. The video project is supported by the ISU Office of the Provost, American Democracy Project (ADP), and Office of the Cross Chair in SoTL.

As faculty and administrators, we presume that civic engagement in the community and in the classroom is an empowering and transformative experience for students who are able to participate, deeply, in CE projects. With this study, we will document activities on site and hear directly from the students as they reflect on their practical experiences. Through using the technique of digital video documentation, the students will literally and figuratively be given voice on the topic. The documentary technique will also empower the ISU team to share results more broadly with both the traditional academic and the non-traditional general public through postings on campus websites, conference screenings, and local cablecasting. SoTL researchers studying civic engagement, student engagement, or service learning, academic filmmakers using digital documentary as a scholarship method, and local community organizations participating with ISU students in civic projects may find the results of this video project useful.

ⁱ Illinois State University is proud to have participated in CASTL since its earliest beginnings. We have been involved and/or taken leadership roles for over a decade in the initial American Association of Higher Education-Carnegie initiatives and every multi-year phase of the institutional ‘leg’ of CASTL.

ⁱⁱ IRB approval was obtained for this project.