

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Datasets.

THE CIVIC EFFECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

There is a strong link in the United States between education and political and civic participation. Those who spend more years in school and college are more likely to vote, volunteer, and otherwise participate. This does not necessarily mean that colleges and universities enhance students' civic skills and attitudes; rather it may be that education confers social advantages that facilitate civic participation.

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CIRCLE has recently published four detailed fact sheets that update, refine and in some respects, complicate our knowledge of the links between college education and civic engagement by addressing the differences in civic engagement among 2- and 4-year college students, delving deeper into the impact of education on the civic engagement of 18-to-25 year-olds, and analyzing the civic engagement experiences and other characteristics of recent college graduates.

As a greater fraction of the American population attends college (estimated at 53 percent in 2004), it becomes more important to develop tools and measures that help us understand the impact of higher education on young people's civic participation. The following new fact sheets are available on CIRCLE's Web site (www.civicyouth.org):

- "College Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 18-to-25 Year-Olds"
- "Civic Engagement among Recent College Graduates"
- "Civic Engagement among 2-year and 4-year College Students"
- "Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Summary"

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 2-YEAR AND 4-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Consistent with previous research in the field, CIRCLE's analysis of our 2006 *Civic and Political Health of the Nation* survey found that young people who have some college experience are more likely to be civically engaged than their peers who have not attended

college. This pattern remained relatively consistent when young people were grouped into the following four categories depending on their post-secondary educational experience: (1) no college experience, (2) only attended a 2-year institution, (3) attended both a 2-year and a 4-year institution, and (4) only attended a 4-year institution. Four-year students showed the highest levels of civic engagement, followed by the other groups in decreasing order of college experience. The only form of civic engagement that broke this pattern was following the news. Those young adults with no college experience were the most likely, by far, to watch TV news daily, and also the most likely to read the newspaper daily.

IMPACT OF COLLEGE ATTENDANCE ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Research consistently finds that, for almost all forms of civic engagement, those with more education are more involved. In the recent survey, however, there were several notable exceptions. Current college students (rather than college graduates) were the most heavily involved in the following activities: running, biking, or walking for charity; displaying a campaign button or sign; trying to persuade others about an election (tied with the college graduates); protesting (tied with the non-college youth); and contacting the broadcast media (tied with people with only some college). Young adults without any college experience were the most likely to protest (tied with college graduates) and just as likely to volunteer as those with some college experience. The research also found differences in the form of civic participation by gender.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CONTINUES AFTER COLLEGE GRADUATION

The third CIRCLE fact sheet analyzes behavior of college graduates in the years after they complete their four-year undergraduate degrees. CIRCLE's findings (based mainly on the Baccalaureate and Beyond survey) suggest that:

- African-American and Native-American college graduates are more highly engaged than whites;
- graduates of private universities are more engaged than those who graduate from public institutions;
- verbal SAT scores correlate with political participation;
- and, graduates with degrees in law, public administration, planning or the humanities are more engaged than are their peers in other fields

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A SYNTHESIS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

For more information on college attendance and civic engagement—and recommendations for research and policy—see also “Higher Education: Civic Mission & Civic Effects.” This joint report produced by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and CIRCLE is a consensus statement of 22 scholars that explores

the civic effects of attending college and the benefits of various approaches to civic learning in higher education. The authors represent the fields of political science, psychology, economics, philosophy, sociology, research on higher education, and women’s studies. The report concludes with a research agenda. For a free hard copy of the report, please contact Dionne Williams at dwillia8@umd.edu or (301) 405-2790. A PDF of the report can be downloaded from CIRCLE’s Web site. [*](#)

CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

CIRCLE has produced forty-eight Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE’s Web site:

≡ **Young Voters in the 2006 Elections.** Using data from the National Election Pool, National Exit Poll, 1992-2006, the fact sheet provides information on 2006 youth voter turnout, voter turnout trends, and youth voter attitudes.

≡ **Immigrant Youth Demographics.** Compares the numbers of 18-25 year-old **immigrants** by nativity status, gender, race, ethnicity, geographic distribution, country of origin, year of arrival, marital status, educational attainment. Assesses population trends from 1994-2006.

≡ **2006 Youth Demographics.** Compares the numbers of 18-25 year-old **residents and citizens** by gender, race, ethnicity, geographic distribution, marital status, military status, unemployment, educational attainment. Assesses population trends from 1968-2006.

≡ **College Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 18- to-25 Year-Olds.** Presents new evidence on the correlation between a wide range of civic engagement measures and college attendance.

≡ **Civic Engagement among Recent College Graduates.** Examines civic engagement of recent college graduates. Highlights relationships between core civic engagement measures, on the one hand, and graduates’ race and ethnicity, gender, type of college or university, SAT scores, and major field of study, on the other.

≡ **Civic Engagement among 2-year and 4-year College Students.** Uses one relatively recent dataset to look closely at community college students. It shows that graduates generally fall between 4-year college students and high school graduates in their civic engagement. In some respects, community college students (especially transfers) are quite close to those who hold bachelor’s degrees, although they come from less advantaged backgrounds.

≡ **Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Summary.** This fact sheet is a summary of key points from the aforementioned three fact sheets on civic engagement and higher education.