

Chapter 4

Student Self–Assessment via Civic Engagement

ABSTRACT

In Year Four of this Initiative, the two faculty instructors introduced civic engagement portfolios to the cohort of students enrolled in the Initiative. The portfolios were being used to capture the freshmen college students' experiences with civic engagement during their first year of college. The cohort's portfolios were actually creating and piloting the portfolios as part of the larger institution's desire to assess its students' civic engagement as a component of college-wide learning outcomes recently adopted across campus. Initially the assessment was planned for seniors, but based on the encouragement of Initiative faculty, starting these portfolios when students enter college will allow the school to assess students' civic engagement development over time.

Every time I decide to put myself out there I seem to come out of the experience feeling like I have changed for the better in some way. – First-year student

INTRODUCTION

Our institution of higher education collectively worked on creating college-wide learning outcomes with the mindset that these outcomes would be weaved

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2452-6.ch004

through the various classes students will be taking before they graduate from our institution. Civic Engagement is one of the college-wide learning outcomes. To break down civic engagement for our first-year students, millennials, we analyzed the civic engagement portfolios the students created on their first-year experiences, the focus group responses on the question on civic engagement for themes, their final reflection on the one area they grew the most their first year, and we analyzed follow up questions on civic engagement as students are two months into their second year. Through these multiple modes of analyzing our students' civic engagement, we gain understanding on how they view the concept, how they engage in civic engagement, and how they grow and develop as civically engaged millennials.

COLLEGE-WIDE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Being a small liberal arts institute in higher education, we value preparing our students for not only a future career, but also for life. Through their college experience of taking classes across campus and engaging in on-campus and off-campus experiences, students develop into well-rounded, open-minded adults. Our campus created a campus-wide committee to identify five college-wide learning outcomes that will not only help students gain proficiency in the content of their own major, but give them the skills and knowledge to prepare them for meaningful work, to become active citizens, and to become lifelong learners. The goal was that during the four years at our institution and through their classes and experiences they would develop the skills and knowledge in five areas: critical thinking, creative inquiry, intercultural competence, civic engagement, and commitment to well-being. Our institution defines these college-wide learning outcomes as (<http://www.keene.edu/academics/liberal-arts/outcomes/>):

- **Critical Thinking:** Keene State College students will evaluate evidence, consider multiple perspectives, choose and defend a position from several alternatives, and analyze complex problems.
- **Creative Inquiry:** Keene State College students will engage in research, scholarly activity or creative work to contribute new knowledge, art or expression and reflect on the process of inquiry or self-expression.

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