Measuring the Concepts “Civic-Minded Graduate” and “Civic-Minded Professional”: Developing Quantitative and Qualitative Measures to Advance Research

Julie Hatcher, Robert Bringle, Kathryn Steinberg

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana, United States

What is the research problem to be addressed and the aim of the research?

A thriving third sector depends upon the active participation of citizens. Citizens can participate in the third sector through voluntary action, political action, or donating of their time, talents, and treasures. Cultivating this type of behavior is of critical importance to sustaining democratic society (Bellah et. al, 1987; Putnam, 2002). Professionals contribute to civil society in important ways, and the public role of professionals has been argued to be of distinct importance in democratic society (Dzur, 2004; Sullivan, 1988, 2005). Cultivating a sense of civic-mindedness among college graduates and future professionals has important implications for higher education. What is the best way to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of graduates to work with others in a democratic way to improve society?

What is the research question?

This session will present two research projects at the Center for Service and Learning (CSL) at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), USA. The two research projects are related, yet distinct. The first research question is “Can the concept of Civic-Minded Graduate (CMG) be operationalized into a scale?” The second is “Can the concept of Civic-Minded Professional (CMP) be operationalized into a scale?” Additionally, the research is designed to answer secondary questions “Are the CMG and CMP scales valid?” and “What educational activities are related to the development of civic-mindedness?”

What theories and concepts inform the research?

This research is shaped by a variety of theoretical frameworks to understand civic-engagement in society and these include social capital, rational choice, and institutional frameworks (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). Involvement in civic activities contributes to the development of normative behavior as well as the development of civic skills and dispositions for civic action (Battistoni, 1997). In addition, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2004) shapes this research. The assumption is that developing civic-mindedness is framed in part by structured experiences that support the expectations of normative behavior of engagement, and in part by the development of internal motivations to sustain personal participation. This represents a transition from extrinsic motivation for civic activities to intrinsic motivation so that the civic activities are self-sustaining.

Two related concepts (a) Civic-Minded Graduate and (b) Civic-Minded Professional were defined and operationalized, and key elements were identified based on an extensive literature review from the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, political science and the multi-disciplinary field of philanthropic studies (e.g., Battistoni, 1997; Bellah, 1985; Bender, 1979; Brint, 1994; Colby & Damon, 1992; Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Dzur, 2004; Gardner, 2001; Kimball, 1992; Kirlin, 2003; Peters, 2004; Rhode, 2005; Sullivan, 1988, 1995, 2004, 2005, 2008). In addition, conversations with informed scholars (e.g., Anne Colby, Scott Peters, John Saltmarsh, William Sullivan) and collaboration with others in the field (e.g., University of Maryland, Tufts University, Tulane University) informed this research. Survey
items for each scale were created, piloted, and refined or deleted based on statistical analysis of items during the pilot phase of each research project.

**What is the research methodology and design?**

To take a theoretical concept and operationalize the concept into a valid scale for empirical research is a complex task, and steps of this process will be shared. The same is true for developing a rubric to assess student narratives and interviews.

These two research projects used domain-sampling theory for scale development to design a quantitative measure for each construct (see Bringle et. al. *The measure of service learning*, 2004; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Two quantitative scales (i.e., Civic-Minded Graduate scale, Civic-Minded Professional scale) and two qualitative measurement procedures (Civic-Minded Graduate narrative and rubric; Civic-Minded Graduate interview) were designed and evaluated for reliability and validity.

**What are the key theoretical and/or empirical findings?**

Findings from the first research project are based on a campus survey and a sample of undergraduates (n=606). The empirical findings for the 30-item CMG scale (Cronbach alpha .96) yielded one factor that accounted for 49.4% variance. Taking one or more service learning classes was associated with higher scores on the CMG scale. Construct validity using the CMG narrative prompt (n= 29) and semi-structured face-to-face interviews (n=41) showed good reliability. Converging evidence on all three procedures establishes validity for the construct of the Civic Minded Graduate.

Findings from the second research project are based on a national survey of faculty in higher education (n=373). The empirical evaluation of the 32-item CMP scale (Cronbach alpha .95), yielded five factors (i.e., Voluntary Action, Identity and Calling, Citizenship, Social Trustee, Consensus Building) accounting for 60.4% variance. Reliability of each factor will be reported as well as convergent validity with the Public Service Interest Scale (Perry & Thompson) and correlations with professional service activities.

The importance of this research lies in the future use of the CMG scale, narrative, and rubric, and the CMP scale for educators and implications for practitioners who design programs to support the development of civic-minded graduates and professionals. The session will highlight how operationalizing CMG as a dependent or mediating variable will contribute to empirical research that sheds light on the types of curricular interventions that can foster civic responsibility through intentionally designed educational experiences (e.g., service learning). Operationalizing CMP as a variable will contribute to empirical research that sheds light on the types of curricular and co-curricular activities that can foster civic responsibility among students in professional education and subsequent careers (e.g., engineering, medicine, law). Additionally, this research will increase understanding of faculty who participate in service learning and community-based research and professionals who contribute time through pro bono professional service. In the end, we are most interested in having the ability to understand the developmental processes behind the questions, "What educational strategies contribute to a college student's understanding of themselves as a civic-minded graduate or a civic-minded professional?"