

Cracks in the Bedrock of American Democracy:  
Differences in Civic Engagement across Institutions of Higher Education

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### **Abstract**

Preparing educated and active citizens is one of the primary goals of higher education, and we tend to assume institutions have approximately similar goals, investments, and outcomes in their civic engagement efforts across the landscape of the industry. By combining several data sources on a diverse set of institutions, we empirically demonstrate that this assumption is false.

Although there are minor differences between public and private institutions and between liberal arts and research institutions, it is the residential component of higher education that is most closely associated with increased emphasis on civic engagement. Even after controlling for selectivity, residency is strongly related to civic engagement outcomes. Given the growing number of non-traditional students attending non-residential institutions, this finding has important implications for whether higher education is an effective instrument for preparing citizens who are active in their community and politically.

## Cracks in the Bedrock of American Democracy:

### Differences in Civic Engagement across Institutions of Higher Education

Ensuring that our citizenry is prepared to actively participate in our diverse democratic society is one of the chief purposes of American higher education (Labaree, 1997; Lagemann & Lewis, 2012; Lawry, Laurison, & VanAntwerpen, 2006; National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012; Sax, 2004). Despite the critical importance of higher education in creating civically engaged citizens, there is little quantitative research examining civic engagement across different institutions of higher education. We do not know, for example, whether the public mission espoused by public institutions translates into activities that foster the development of civically engaged citizens. We neither know whether a focus on the liberal arts generates improved civic engagement outcomes, nor whether the residential experience is key to developing civically engaged college graduates. This study bolsters the research on college civic engagement by employing a new and unique cross-institutional dataset to answer our research question: Are there differences in institutional missions, infrastructures, activities, and outcomes related to civic engagement across various types of institutions - public and private, research and liberal arts, and residential and commuter institutions?

We draw upon multiple sources of data for a diverse set of 270 institutions of higher education to answer our question. We conducted a text analysis of institutional mission statements, examined institutional civic engagement office websites, and incorporated civic engagement outcome data from the *Washington Monthly* college rankings. To ensure the results are not driven by our sample, we supplemented these data with IPEDS data from a much wider set of institutions. This combination of such disparate data sources allowed us to develop a more complete view of civic engagement in higher education.

Results indicate that private institutions had greater civic engagement infrastructure and pursued more civic engagement activities than publics, but research institutions had a greater variety of civic engagement activities than liberal arts colleges. The most striking finding is that residential campuses focused much more strongly on civic development than do commuter campuses, which has broad implications for the changing higher education landscape. As more students pursue non-residential routes through higher education, in part employing online learning, we must consider how best to provide civic development opportunities to these learners.

### **Prior Research on Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement research can be categorized into several different areas of focus including service learning (e.g. Bureau, Cole, & McCormick, 2014; Holland, 1997), student-level civic engagement outcomes (e.g. Barnhardt, Sheets, & Pasquesi, 2015; Colby, 2008, Hillygus, 2005; Sax, 2004), campus collective action (e.g. Barnhardt, 2015), definitions of civic knowledge and engagement (e.g. Jacoby, 2009), and the civic missions of higher education institutions (e.g. Checkoway, 2001; Morpew & Hartley, 2006; Saichaie & Morpew, 2014).

This corpus of work tends to focus on theory over empirical analysis, employs case studies of a few institutions, and examines only one or two components of civic engagement. Our contribution applies quantitative analysis on several disparate data sets to shed light on the institutional characteristics related to civic engagement mission, infrastructure, activities, and outcomes. As far as we are aware, this paper is the first to study all four of these aspects of civic engagement across a large and diverse set of institutions.

There are a few empirical papers that are closely aligned with our work. Ostrander (2004) considered organizational structures of civic engagement across five college campuses and

concluded that two structural features are critical to building successful civic engagement partnerships between the institution and the community: establishing a formal association that links the institution with community organizations and providing university based staffing for that partnership. Being a qualitative case study analysis however, the findings were limited to the five elite institutions that were intentionally chosen for their focus on civic engagement.

Relying on student survey data from 209 four-year colleges, Sax (2004) used regression analysis to examine the effects of college environment on three student level civic engagement outcomes: commitment to social activism, sense of empowerment, and community involvement. She found campus wide commitment to social activism to have a positive association with individual students' commitment to social activism and subsequent involvement in the community after college. She also found that studying engineering has a negative relationship with social activism. Although Sax provided insights into a few institutional characteristics related to promoting civic engagement, she did not directly address the question of our paper: whether different types of institutions have different commitments to civic engagement.

Barnhardt, Sheets, and Pasquesi (2015) also examined how several institutional characteristics were related to students' assessments of their commitment and skills to change society as measured on a campus climate survey at 23 campuses. Campus size and selectivity were negatively associated with students' reported commitments to contributing to the larger community, but activities such as participation in service and community based projects in coursework were positively associated with the two outcomes.

Our paper extends this work to a much larger set of institutions and focuses on a greater variety of civic engagement activities while also incorporating institutional mission and infrastructure. Instead of relying on student reported outcomes, we employ several distinct

institution level outcomes. Furthermore, our study utilizes a broad definition of civic engagement that includes public service, service learning, political engagement, and military service.

### **Civic Engagement Differences by Institution Type**

There are several explanations for why we might expect the focus on civic engagement to differ by institution type that led us to several research hypotheses. Given their history, mission, and public financing, we expected public institutions to have a greater focus on civic engagement in their mission, infrastructure, and activities. These predictions are consistent with Morphew & Hartley's (2006) findings that public universities' mission statements underscored the importance of providing service to the surrounding community and instilling a sense of civic duty in students while private universities' missions tended to focus on the students' individual development and preparing graduates for the real world.

We also expected liberal arts colleges to exceed research institutions in their civic engagement focus. As their name implies, liberal arts colleges provide a liberal education which has long been associated with educating students to become informed and active members in society (Labaree, 1997; Lawry, Laurison, & VanAntwerpen, 2006). This assertion is further supported by the findings of Hillygus (2005) and Nie & Hillygus (2001) who noted that college students concentrating their studies in the social sciences and humanities were more likely to participate in community service, vote, discuss politics, and participate in politics after college. Furthermore, empirical evidence demonstrated that engineering students have less commitment to social activism (Sax, 2004). These findings suggest liberal arts colleges place a greater emphasis on establishing the infrastructure to support numerous civic engagement activities that lead to improved civic engagement outcomes.

Finally, we expected a relationship between the prevalence of students living on campus and a well developed civic engagement environment. When compared to commuter schools, highly residential institutions serve a more traditional college student and have greater resources (NCES, 2002). While the research has not yet shown a statistically significant relationship regarding the proportion of students living on campus and increased student participation in civic activities, residential colleges have more opportunities to create enriching educational experiences, facilitate volunteer opportunities, and foster diverse political opinions (Knox, Lindsay, & Kolb, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As a result, we expected students on residential campuses to have access to more activities, greater infrastructure, and better civic engagement outcomes than students at commuter campuses.

### **Defining and Operationalizing Civic Engagement**

There is little consensus in defining civic engagement (Jacoby, 2009; Rowan-Kenyon, Soldner, & Kurotsuchi Inkelas, 2007). We view civic engagement education as a democracy and citizenship building activity that derives from the writing of classical political thinkers like Locke, Kant, and Mill (Speck & Hoppe, 2004). The purpose of civic education is to create an active corps of people conducting service in their communities, participating in organizations that comprise our civil society, and engaging politically (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2010; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Putnam, 2001; Speck & Hoppe, 2004).

This perspective provides a broad view of civic engagement. Instead of limiting civic engagement to only public service or service learning activities, we extend the definition to include political engagement as demonstrated by voting and participating in local, state, and federal political events and policy discussions. Furthermore, we are interested in civic

engagement as it pertains to public service. This perspective leads us to operationalize civic engagement mission, structure, activities, and outcomes in the following ways.

**Mission.** Most of the research on mission statements in higher education has viewed them as aspirational documents, tying institutional activity to some broader goal (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). We assumed that mission statements represented an institution's fundamental goals; therefore, a reference to civic engagement demonstrated an institution's commitment to the civic education. To assess the extent to which civic engagement aspirations in institution mission statements differed across institutions, we created indicator variables for the presence of keywords in mission statements. We chose words to reflect our broad understanding of civic engagement including "citizen, civic engagement, democracy, social justice, volunteer, service, and vote."

**Infrastructure.** In our study of on-campus civic engagement infrastructure, we drew on resource dependency theory (Tolbert, 1985). We believe that devoting resources to civic engagement signaled a commitment to beyond the aspirational goals of a mission statement. We argue that a campus valuing civic engagement will have devoted labor and capital to that goal. Therefore, we first determined whether a institution has any office solely dedicated to civic engagement on campus. Then we counted the number of staff associated with that office per 1000 enrolled students to create a measure that accounts for institution size.

**Activities.** Our broad definition of civic engagement led us to evaluate many distinct civic activities that could be offered by institutions. Past studies have shown that student involvement in community service and service-learning built pro-civic attitudes, connections to surrounding communities, and a desire to volunteer further (Astin, 1992; O'Leary, 2014; Sax & Astin, 1997). We therefore included whether students have the option to participate in service

trips, days of student and alumni service, service events during student orientation, and service based work study programs. To account for monetary investment in encouraging service, we included indicators for scholarships related to community service and civic engagement. The literature also suggests there are important curricular components of civic engagement (Hillygus, 2005; Scobey, 2010), so we recorded whether each institution offers a service learning class for credit or requires a service-learning course. We also examined whether a civic engagement themed residence hall was present on campus to account for a concentrated residential experience given that Rowan-Kenyon, Soldner, & Kurotsuchi Inkelas (2007) found, in one of their analyses, that students who participated in civic living learning programs had significantly higher mean scores for sense of civic engagement than students who participated in non-civic-centered living learning programs or lived in the traditional residence halls.

To broaden the focus beyond service, we included political engagement as a civic engagement competency with its own related activities (Morgan & Orphan, 2015; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). This area is largely understudied, with little in the literature to guide us in choosing measures for political engagement (Colby, 2008; O’Leary, 2014; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). Organizing legislative action days, in which students lobby a local, state, or federal authority, was the one measure of political activity that was widely available in the data. We included this metric as our measure of political activity.

**Outcomes.** Most of the empirical work on returns to civic education has come from political science and economics and focuses on voting behavior, which was not available in our data (e.g. Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2002; Dee, 2004; Hillygus, 2005). The empirical work on civic engagement in the education literature has focused predominantly on student level outcomes (e.g. Barnhardt, Sheets, & Psquesi, 2015; Colby, 2008; Hillygus, 2005; Sax, 2004)

without examining institution level outcomes. Robert Kelchen, in *Washington Monthly*, has rated colleges and universities on their civic engagement outcomes as part of the magazine's annual college rankings publication (Washington Monthly, 2012). We relied on their civic engagement outcomes including whether a college or university received the President's Service Honor Roll, whether it received the elective Carnegie Civic Engagement Classification, the number of ROTC cadets enrolled in each branch at the institution, and the number of students who went into the Peace Corps upon graduation.

### **Sample, Data, & Methods**

We selected our sample of 270 colleges and universities based on the desire to test differences in civic engagement structures and activities across various types of institutions. Specifically, we choose the American Association of Universities (AAU) as our sample of research universities, the Annapolis Group as our sample of liberal arts colleges, and the U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) list of "Universities Where the Most Freshmen Commute" for the commuter institutions.<sup>1</sup> From this group, we excluded military academies, for-profit institutions, special interest institutions such as culinary or arts schools, and two-year community colleges due to the specific nature of their missions. The first two groups (AAU and Annapolis Group) are elite, residential institutions that likely have the resources available to devote to civic engagement activities. The commuter group is largely non-elite, non-residential and as such, is expected to have fewer resources available to devote to civic engagement activities.

The data for our quantitative study was gathered from four different sources for the 2013-14 academic year: civic engagement-related office websites, institutional mission statements, *Washington Monthly* civic engagement outcomes, and IPEDS. We collected data on the civic engagement offices and activities of each institution through a content analysis of each college

and university's civic engagement-related websites. The data collection began with a Google search of "civic engagement office" or "community service office" for each institution, and, if no link was returned, we explored the institution's website to locate any office or division related to civic engagement or community service. From this search, we recorded which offices participated in civic engagement, their staffing levels, and all mention of activities related to our civic engagement activities discussed above. While most activities appeared on the civic engagement office websites, information on scholarships was usually obtained from the institution's financial aid page and orientation programs were found on the admissions page.

Second, we gathered mission statements for each of the postsecondary institutions included in this study. We conducted a text analysis of each mission statement to identify whether it contained each of our civic engagement related words.

Finally, we drew our outcome measures from the Washington Monthly's "Schools Most Devoted to Service" dataset. All of the outcomes were from the 2013-14 academic year except for Army ROTC, which, due to data availability, came from the 2011-12 school year.

In Tables 1-3 below, we provide descriptive statistics of all variables obtained from these three sources of data for different types of institutions. Using t-tests for differences in independent means, we analyzed this sample of institutions across public and private, research and liberal arts, and residential and commuter divides to compare differences in civic engagement mission, infrastructures, activities, and outcomes.

Finally, we employed OLS regression analysis on a much larger sample of institutions using data provided by IPEDS and *Washington Monthly* for the 2011-2012 academic year. The regression analysis serves three purposes. By employing a larger sample of institutions, it reduces the concern that our chosen sample of AAU, Annapolis group, and commuter

institutions explains our results. Second, it enables an analysis of the independent relationship of institutional variables on civic engagement outcomes while controlling for others. Specifically, we can distinguish the role of residency from that of selectivity and enrollment size. We employed the following regression model:

$$Outcome_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Public_i + \beta_2 Research_i + \beta_3 Dormitory_i + \beta_4 Enrollment_i + \beta_5 SAT_i + \varepsilon_i$$

We regressed three different civic engagement outcomes (ROTC enrollment, Peace Corps volunteers, and number of community service hours) on institutional measures that served as proxies for the different types of institutions we examined. “Public” is an indicator variable for whether the institution is in the public sector, “Research” captures the total annual research funding of the institution and serves as a proxy for research institution, and “Dormitory” is the number of beds on-campus reflecting whether the institution serves a predominantly residential or commuter student population. We also included controls for institutional selectivity (“SAT”) using the 75th percentile of combined math and verbal SAT scores with ACT concordance and total enrollment (“Enrollment”) which is the total full-time, first-time undergraduate enrollment at that institution. We standardized all of the continuous measures to estimate effect sizes.

The regression analysis sample included Title IV participating, non-proprietary four-year institutions with first-time, full-time undergraduates. We excluded institutions with special missions such as bible colleges, tribal colleges, military academies, and schools of art and design. A few institutions did not report data for research funding, dormitory capacity, enrollment, or SAT/ACT scores; we used casewise deletion to drop those institutions. The final analytic sample included 1,184 institutions.

## Results

### Public/Private

We begin by discussing the observed civic engagement differences between public and private institutions. The set of private institutions comprised all of the Annapolis Group liberal arts colleges, the private research institutions in the AAU, and not-for-profit private commuter schools on the USNWR list. The public research institutions in the AAU and the public commuter schools on the USNWR list made up the public sample. For each of our civic engagement measures, Table 1 presents the means of private and public institutions, the difference of private minus public means, and the p-value of the t-test conducted on that difference. The variables are grouped by category (mission statements, infrastructure, activities, and outcomes). The number of observations varies slightly across measures due to the lack of reliable data on some measures for a small number of institutions.

Due to their public mission, our hypothesis was that public institutions would exhibit a greater focus on civic engagement. The results from the mission statement analysis supported our hypothesis as public institutions are more likely to use the terms citizen, civic engagement, and service than their private counterparts in describing their institutional mission. The only exception to the pattern was that social justice existed in 7.1 percent of private institutions but did not exist at all in the public mission statements we analyzed. None of the mission statements mentioned voting. These findings comport with existing literature that has demonstrated that public institutions emphasize service to the community in their mission statements (Saichae & Morphey, 2014).

The aspirational goals of public institutions as evidenced by the mission statements, however, did not appear to play out in the civic engagement activities undertaken. The only activity public institutions engaged in more frequently than private institutions was a legislative action day, but the difference was not statistically significant. In contrast, private colleges were

much more active in service activities such as offering service trips, a day of service, service during freshmen orientation, and requiring a service learning course. Private colleges were also 14 percentage points more likely to offer a civic engagement themed residence hall.

On the infrastructure measures, we noted that private colleges were more likely to have an office dedicated specifically to civic engagement and have more staff per capita than public institutions. These infrastructure advantages may explain why private institutions were able to offer significantly more civic engagement activities for their students.

Finally, the results on the outcomes measures were mixed. Publics were more likely to be listed in the Carnegie Foundation's civic engagement classification and had a larger proportion of students in the Air Force ROTC, but privates had nearly 2 more Peace Corps members per thousand students.

Taken collectively, these results run counter to our initial expectations. They neither suggest public institutions provide more civic engagement opportunities nor offer improved civic engagement outcomes relative to private institutions despite the loftier goals of their mission statements.

### **Research/Liberal Arts**

Table 2 replicates Table 1 for research and liberal arts institutions to test our hypothesis that, due to the greater emphasis placed on developing students as citizens, liberal arts colleges would have higher values on our mission, activity, infrastructure, and outcome measures than research institutions. The research institution sample comprised the AAU universities while the Annapolis Group institutions made up the liberal arts colleges; therefore, the research university sample contained some public institutions while the liberal arts sample does not. We excluded all commuter schools from this analysis.

We observed little difference in the mission statements between the two groups. However, there was a large difference in the number of staff, with liberal arts institutions having, on average, over three times the number of staff members per 1000 students than research institutions.

In terms of activities, research universities were more likely to offer days of service for both students and alumni as well as a service work study program. They also sponsored legislative action days much more frequently than liberal arts colleges, most likely due to the enormous amount of federal grant dollars that flow to those institutions for research activities. Liberal arts colleges were more likely to offer service activities in their orientation programs and ten percentage points more likely to require a service learning class as part of the curriculum; however, the option for taking a service learning course exists almost universally at both types of institutions.

Research institutions had far greater Navy and Air Force ROTC participation, but liberal arts colleges had far greater Peace Corps participation. Over three students out of a thousand entered the Peace Corps after graduation from liberal arts colleges, nearly twice the rate of research institutions. Both types of institutions participated in the President's service honor roll and Carnegie civic engagement classification at equally low rates.

Our hypothesis of greater civic engagement in liberal arts colleges was not supported by the evidence. There was no difference in the value placed on civic engagement according to the mission statements, and, at least in terms of service activities, research institutions offered as many, if not more, opportunities than liberal arts colleges with fairly equal results in outcomes. This result was somewhat surprising given the substantially larger commitment of staffing resources to civic engagement on liberal arts campuses. Perhaps economies of scale explain this

result as research institutions can civically educate larger number of students more efficiently, or perhaps these additional staff members contribute to alternative activities and outcomes not easily measured.

### **Residential/Commuter**

Our final comparison examined the difference between residential and commuter institutions of higher education. The residential sample included all of the AAU and Annapolis Group institutions while the USNWR commuter list provided the sample for the commuter colleges.

There was little difference between residential and commuter institutions in civic engagement language in the mission statements. A few more commuter institutions explicitly mentioned “civic engagement,” but only a small handful of institutions used these words in their mission statements. The infrastructure results, however, demonstrated a greater number of offices and staff devoted to civic engagement at residential institutions. Only half of commuter institutions had an office dedicated to civic engagement, and there was an enormous difference of 2.3 staff members per thousand students in favor of residential institutions.

The residential institution commitment to civic engagement was also clear in the activities available. All eleven of our activity measures was practically and statistically significantly larger in residential colleges. This result could be explained by residential institutions generally creating more extracurricular activities for their students who live on campus, but the service learning course results suggested this was true even within the curriculum.

Additionally, the ROTC and Peace Corps outcomes strongly favored residential colleges. The President’s service honor roll was similar across institution types, but the Carnegie civic

engagement classification favored commuter colleges. More than double the number of commuter schools were classified by the Carnegie Foundation as residential colleges. It is possible that commuter institutions believe the Carnegie classification is a low cost method of demonstrating a commitment to civic engagement, but we do not know whether this result was due to more commuter institutions applying for the Carnegie classification or if those institutions had a higher rate of acceptance. Taken together, these results indicate residential colleges have a stronger commitment to civic engagement activities.

### **Role of Selectivity**

It is possible the above residential versus commuter campus results were driven by elite status as opposed to the residential experience itself given that nearly all of the residential campuses could be considered selective, elite institutions and nearly all of the commuter campuses are not. To distinguish the role of residency from that of selectivity (our proxy for eliteness), we relied on our regression analysis using IPEDS data on our larger sample of institutions. Table 4 provides descriptive statistics on the regression dependent and independent variables.

We regressed our outcomes on measures of residency (total dormitory capacity) and selectivity (incoming class SAT and ACT scores)<sup>2</sup> with controls for public, total research funding, and total enrollment. The three outcomes are total community service hours accumulated by students, the number of ROTC cadets across all three branches, and number of Peace Corps volunteers from the institution.<sup>3</sup> Table 5 reports the regression results using standardized coefficients for all of the continuous measures.

Results across a far wider range of institutions than our initial sample demonstrated that residency is an important determinant of civic engagement outcomes even after controlling for

selectivity, size, research funding, and control. Although neither regressor has an association with total community service hours, total dormitory capacity has a highly significant positive relationship with Peace Corps volunteers and number of students in ROTC. Controlling for the other measures, a one standard deviation increase in total dormitory capacity predicts about a fifth of a standard deviation increase in these two outcomes. The effect size is on par with the individual relationship of selectivity and Peace Corps volunteers and much greater than the estimated zero relationship between selectivity and ROTC.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

Because of their core mission of “educating citizens for life in democracy”, higher education institutions play an important role in civil society (Loss, 2012, pg. 6). Not all institutions, however, have the same capacity for democracy building. Our investigation has uncovered differences in mission, infrastructure, activities, and outcomes across different types of institutions shedding light on the differential capacity to provide civic education.

Although we found only minor differences between public and private research universities or between selective research universities and selective liberal arts colleges across all of our civic engagement measures, we discovered consistent and sizable evidence that residential institutions place a greater emphasis on civic engagement than commuter institutions. By expanding our dataset to include nearly the universe of four-year colleges, we are able to control for selectivity, funding, and size to demonstrate that this finding is related to the residential component of postsecondary education.

It is insightful to place this finding in the context of prior civic engagement research. Qualitative research revealed that students at elite institutions (both public and private) had greater resources and opportunities to become civically engaged (Kiesa et al., 2007). Our study

suggests selectivity may play a role but that the residential experience has at least as large a role. Interestingly, Knox et al. (1993) found no relationship between residency status and student participation in community groups, volunteer work, youth organizations, or non-worship church activities. We believe our finding of no discernable relationship between community service hours and residency status is consistent with this prior work, but our examination of broader outcomes to include Peace Corp and military service provides a more complete picture of the relationship between the residential experience and civic engagement. An institution's focus on a residential experience appears to have a significant relationship to staffing, civic engagement activities, and important civic engagement outcomes even after controlling for control, research funding, size, and selectivity.

While we make an important contribution to the literature, there are several limitations with our study. We chose a purposive sample to focus explicitly on the differences between public and private institutions, research universities and liberal arts colleges, and residential and commuter institutions. We do not argue that the AAU is representative of all research universities or that the Annapolis Group is representative of all liberal arts colleges, but both groups are comprised of institutions that are leaders in their sector and serve as aspirational peers for a large number of institutions. The lack of representativeness is further mitigated by our regression analysis in which we used a sample that represents nearly the entirety of four-year higher education in the United States save for special interest and for-profit institutions.

Data availability provided an additional limitation in this study. We would have liked to examine additional civic outcome measures such as voter registration, running for public office, or working for non-profit agencies dedicated to public service. Unfortunately, few institutions track these important outcomes, providing an avenue for future data collection and research.

Despite these limitations, the study still suggests that on-campus living is related to the development of civically engaged college graduates. This is a troubling finding given current trend of growing non-residential postsecondary enrollment. A growing public policy focus on trade schools and community colleges, increased emphasis on online education, and the expansion of the for-profit sector have undoubtedly increased access to higher education but predominantly in non-residential settings. The American four-year college was built on the foundation of the British residential college, with its originators believing the residential component beneficial to student development (Delbanco, 2012). Most higher education institutions in the United States, however, no longer follows that design.

Furthermore, students, aged 18-24, living on residential campuses are no longer the norm of higher education. Around three-quarters of college-going students do not fit that demographic profile, and most of these "non-traditional" students choose to attend non-residential postsecondary education (NCES, 2002). If higher education is intended to serve as a collective foundation of American democracy, but non-residential institutions are not able to ensure the same civic opportunities and outcomes as residential institutions, we may begin to see cracks in that foundation. An entire generation of college students attending non-residential institutions may have less exposure to civic education to the detriment of our civil society.

Two broad solutions are available. Policy makers may choose to bolster the residential capacity of open-access, online, and commuter institutions thereby increasing the share of higher education that is residential. Given the high financial cost of increased residential infrastructure and the large portion of non-traditional students who prefer a non-residential education, this solution seems far from ideal. Instead, higher education leaders must learn how to build civic

education into non-residential settings. The future of America's vibrant democracy may depend on it.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/the-short-list>

[college/articles/2015/07/07/universities-where-the-most-freshmen-commute](http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/the-short-list-college/articles/2015/07/07/universities-where-the-most-freshmen-commute)

<sup>2</sup> We also tested an alternative measure of selectivity, the percent of applicants admitted by the institution, and found qualitatively similar results.

<sup>3</sup> The community service hours sample represents only those institutions who classified service hours as general community service hours and reported those hours to *Washington Monthly*, resulting in a smaller sample than the sample used for the ROTC and Peace Corps analyses.

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Table 1: Civic engagement differences by institutional control

	Private	N	Public	N	Difference	P-value
<b>MISSION STATEMENTS</b>						
Citizen	0.172	169	0.267	101	-0.096	0.061
Civic engagement	0.000	169	0.040	101	-0.040	0.009
Democracy	0.036	169	0.020	101	0.016	0.463
Social justice	0.071	169	0.000	101	0.071	0.006
Volunteer	0.024	169	0.010	101	0.014	0.419
Service	0.325	169	0.455	101	-0.130	0.033
Vote	0.000	169	0.000	101	0.000	1.000
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>						
Indicator for having a civic engagement office	0.888	169	0.673	101	0.214	0.000
Number of staff per 1000 students	2.687	155	0.250	88	2.437	0.000
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>						
Service trips	0.874	167	0.592	98	0.282	0.000
Day of service	0.826	167	0.667	99	0.160	0.003
Alumni day of service	0.386	166	0.289	97	0.097	0.113
Service orientation	0.566	166	0.177	96	0.389	0.000
Themed residence hall	0.273	165	0.134	97	0.139	0.009
Scholarship, current students	0.377	159	0.344	96	0.034	0.591
Scholarship, incoming students	0.230	161	0.189	95	0.040	0.450
Service work study program	0.620	166	0.602	98	0.018	0.767
Required service learning class	0.121	165	0.010	99	0.111	0.001
Optional service learning class	0.898	166	0.778	99	0.120	0.008
Legislative action day	0.255	165	0.328	96	-0.074	0.203
<b>OUTCOMES</b>						
President's service honor roll	0.361	169	0.337	101	0.024	0.687
Carnegie civic engagement classification	0.107	169	0.267	101	-0.161	0.001
ROTC: Army per 1000 students	0.463	169	0.427	101	0.036	0.890
ROTC: Navy per 1000 students	0.429	169	0.571	101	-0.142	0.458
ROTC: Air Force per 1000 students	0.253	169	1.020	101	-0.768	0.001
Peace Corps per 1000 students	2.568	169	0.809	101	1.759	0.000

Notes: With the exception of the number of staff per 1000 students, ROTC, and Peace Corps variables, variables are binary indicators. "Citizen" includes references to the words citizenship, citizenry, citizen, and citizenship. Sample includes 270 colleges and universities making up the Association of American Universities representing institutions with very high research activity, the Annapolis Group of liberal arts colleges, and *US News and World Report's* list of 100 schools with the lowest percentages of students living in on-campus housing, and excludes special interest institutions such as music conservatories and bible colleges, and for-profit institution campuses. Outcome data come from *Washington Monthly's* annual college ratings from the 2013-2014 academic year, with the exception of the Army ROTC data, which were not available for that year and instead come from the 2011-2012 school year.

**Table 2: Civic engagement differences between research universities and liberal arts colleges**

	<i>Annapolis Group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>AU</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>P-value</i>
<b>MISSION STATEMENTS</b>						
Citizen	0.202	124	0.214	56	-0.013	0.847
Civic engagement	0.000	124	0.018	56	-0.018	0.137
Democracy	0.040	124	0.036	56	0.005	0.883
Social justice	0.065	124	0.018	56	0.047	0.186
Volunteer	0.024	124	0.018	56	0.006	0.791
Service	0.355	124	0.411	56	-0.056	0.476
Vote	0.000	124	0.000	56	0.000	1.000
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>						
Indicator for having a civic engagement office	0.935	124	1.000	56	-0.065	0.052
Number of staff per 1000 students	3.290	113	0.919	50	2.371	0.000
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>						
Service trips	0.943	123	0.926	54	0.017	0.665
Day of service	0.870	123	0.981	54	-0.112	0.020
Alumni day of service	0.374	123	0.784	51	-0.410	0.000
Service orientation	0.634	123	0.490	51	0.144	0.079
Themed residence hall	0.279	122	0.373	51	-0.094	0.224
Scholarship, current students	0.457	116	0.440	50	0.017	0.842
Scholarship, incoming students	0.291	117	0.180	50	0.111	0.136
Service work study program	0.618	123	0.846	52	-0.228	0.003
Required service learning class	0.140	121	0.037	54	0.103	0.042
Optional service learning class	0.967	122	0.963	54	0.004	0.887
Legislative action day	0.246	122	0.765	51	-0.519	0.000
<b>OUTCOMES</b>						
President's service honor roll	0.387	124	0.357	56	0.030	0.703
Carnegie civic engagement classification	0.121	124	0.107	56	0.014	0.791
ROTC: Army per 1000 students	0.563	124	0.138	56	0.426	0.199
ROTC: Navy per 1000 students	0.202	124	1.867	56	-1.666	0.000
ROTC: Air Force per 1000 students	0.140	124	2.055	56	-1.915	0.000
Peace Corps per 1000 students	3.106	124	1.640	56	1.466	0.000

Notes: With the exception of the number of staff per 1000 students, ROTC, and Peace Corps variables, variables are binary indicators. "Citizen" includes references to the words citizenship, citizenry, citizen, and citizenship. Sample includes 270 colleges and universities making up the Association of American Universities representing institutions with very high research activity and the Annapolis Group of liberal arts colleges, and excludes special interest institutions such as music conservatories and bible colleges, and for-profit institution campuses. Outcome data come from *Washington Monthly's* annual college ratings from the 2013-2014 academic year, with the exception of the Army ROTC data, which were not available for that year and instead come from the 2011-2012 school year.

**Table 3: Civic engagement differences by institutional residency status**

	<i>Residential</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Commuter</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>P-value</i>
<b>MISSION STATEMENTS</b>						
Citizen	0.206	180	0.211	90	-0.006	0.916
Civic engagement	0.006	180	0.033	90	-0.028	0.075
Democracy	0.039	180	0.011	90	0.028	0.206
Social justice	0.050	180	0.033	90	0.017	0.533
Volunteer	0.022	180	0.011	90	0.011	0.525
Service	0.372	180	0.378	90	-0.006	0.929
Vote	0.000	180	0.000	90	0.000	1.000
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>						
Indicator for having a civic engagement office	0.956	180	0.511	90	0.444	0.000
Number of staff per 1000 students	2.563	163	0.260	80	2.303	0.000
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>						
Service trips	0.938	177	0.432	88	0.506	0.000
Day of service	0.904	177	0.494	89	0.410	0.000
Alumni day of service	0.494	174	0.067	89	0.427	0.000
Service orientation	0.592	174	0.091	88	0.501	0.000
Themed residence hall	0.306	173	0.056	89	0.250	0.000
Scholarship, current students	0.452	166	0.202	89	0.250	0.000
Scholarship, incoming students	0.257	167	0.135	89	0.123	0.023
Service work study program	0.686	175	0.472	89	0.214	0.001
Required service learning class	0.109	175	0.022	89	0.086	0.014
Optional service learning class	0.966	176	0.629	89	0.337	0.000
Legislative action day	0.399	173	0.051	88	0.348	0.000
<b>OUTCOMES</b>						
President's service honor roll	0.378	180	0.300	90	0.078	0.209
Carnegie civic engagement classification	0.117	180	0.267	90	-0.150	0.002
ROTC: Army per 1000 students	0.431	180	0.486	90	-0.056	0.837
ROTC: Navy per 1000 students	0.720	180	0.006	90	0.714	0.000
ROTC: Air Force per 1000 students	0.736	180	0.148	90	0.588	0.014
Peace Corps per 1000 students	2.650	180	0.430	90	2.220	0.000

Notes: With the exception of the number of staff per 1000 students, ROTC, and Peace Corps variables, variables are binary indicators. "Citizen" includes references to the words citizenship, citizenry, citizen, and citizenship. Sample includes 270 colleges and universities making up the Association of American Universities representing institutions with very high research activity, the Annapolis Group of liberal arts colleges, and *US News and World Report's* list of 100 schools with the lowest percentages of students living in on-campus housing, and excludes special interest institutions such as music conservatories and bible colleges, and for-profit institution campuses. Outcome data come from *Washington Monthly's* annual college ratings from the 2013-2014 academic year, with the exception of the Army ROTC data, which were not available for that year and instead come from the 2011-2012 school year.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics of regression model variables**

	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>
<b>OUTCOMES</b>			
Number of Peace Corps volunteers	1184	6.96	13.56
Total ROTC enrollment	1184	40.62	102.54
Community service hours (in thousands)	484	197.82	593.22
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>			
Public institution indicator	1184	0.38	0.49
Research funding (in \$millions)	1184	25.79	78.96
Total dormitory capacity	1184	2123.97	2238.27
Total undergraduate enrollment	1184	6098.16	7374.29
SAT Composite 75th Percentile with ACT Concordance	1184	1171.81	136.42

Notes: Peace Corps, ROTC, and community service data come from the annual *Washington Monthly* college rankings. The only institutions with complete community service hours data are those included in the *Washington Monthly* rankings, resulting in fewer observations when compared to the Peace Corps and ROTC data. All other variables provided through the Integrated Postsecondary Education System of the National Center for Education Statistics. Table reflects only the institutions for which we had no missing data on the public institution, research funding, dorm capacity, undergraduate enrollment, and SAT variables.

**Table 5: Relationship of institutional characteristics and civic engagement outcomes**

	<i>ROTC Enrollment</i>	<i>Peace Corps Volunteers</i>	<i>Service Hours</i>
Public Institution	-0.08 (0.05)	0.07 (0.07)	-0.32 (0.12)
Total Research Funding	0.36*** (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)	0.00 (0.11)
Total dormitory capacity	0.22** (0.07)	0.17*** (0.05)	0.08 (0.06)
Enrollment - Grand total	0.27*** (0.06)	0.35*** (0.08)	0.43 (0.29)
SAT Composite 75th Percentile	0.16*** (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Constant	0.05* (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.09)
Observations	1184	1184	484
Adjusted $R^2$	0.64	0.27	0.22
F	104.77	77.99	12.03

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables other than the indicator for whether an institution is a public institution are standardized. SAT variable includes ACT concordance. Data come from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the annual *Washington Monthly* college rankings for the 2011-2012 school year.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$