College Students and Politics:
A Literature Review

Nicholas V. Longo
Program Officer
Kettering Foundation
longo@kettering.org

Ross P. Meyer
Graduate Student
Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service
New York University
ross.meyer@nyu.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Because of its interest in the political participation of young people, the Kettering Foundation published *College Students Talk Politics* in 1993 to understand college student political engagement better. The report, based on focus groups with students on campuses around the country, found that most college students believe that politics is not about solving problems; rather, the report found that students saw politics as individualistic, divisive, negative, and often counterproductive to acting on the ills of society.

Since this portrayal of college students' views of politics in the early 1990s, there has been an array of survey research, policy analysis, and commentary that attempts to define, understand, and document the political engagement of young people (Civic Mission of Schools 2003; Keeter et al. 2002; National Commission on Civic Renewal 1998). These studies have found that among the greatest dangers for American democracy is that politics is becoming a spectator sport, an activity that relegates citizens to the sidelines. Perhaps nowhere is this crisis more dramatic than with our youngest generation—a finding consistent with the Kettering Foundation's earlier research on Generation X.

In this review, we hope to provide a deeper understanding of current college students' conceptions of and participation in politics through a review of the scholarly literature. We hope that this review will help us refine our research questions and ultimately lead to a larger follow-up research study on college student political engagement. We looked at the existing research with a few questions in mind:

- How do college students understand, define, and view politics, their political engagement, and the work of democracy?

- Are college students politically engaged? How do college students practice politics?

- How can institutions of higher education help foster greater political participation among college students?

NARRATIVE OF THE LITERATURE

Through our review of the literature, we found several emerging and often overlapping trends. The narrative of our review might be described in the following way:

- There have been several general studies on college students as a demographic group with data on some aspects of their political knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and practices.

- Much of the research indicates that college students today are cynical about politics and apathetic when it comes to political participation.

- However, after years of decline, there has been a recent increase in voting, trust in government, and other forms of political participation among college students in the past few years.

- There has also been a "scissor effect": years of decline in political participation have coincided with a surge in volunteering and involvement in community.

- There are various interpretations for the rise in community service and its implications for democracy, with many contending that there is no connection between community service and political participation; community service, it seems, may simply be an "alternative to politics."

- At the same time, there is a strand of literature arguing that there is a need for an alternative politics led by young people, and there seems to be an emergence of this "politics that is not called politics" on college campuses.

- Finally, there is widespread agreement in the literature about the great political potential of this generation of college students; and that colleges and universities need to do more to educate the next generation for democracy and provide more opportunities for political participation.

WHY NOW? TRENDS AND EMERGING RESEARCH AREAS

Our review of the literature also makes clear that while much research has been done on college student political engagement in the past decade, there are many interesting and important areas for future inquiry. Among interesting trends in need of further exploration:

- More robust understanding of the emerging movement among college students to define an alternative politics that is more participatory, inclusive, open, creative, and deliberative—a trend first noted in the forward to College Students Talk Politics, which has only grown in the decade since.

- Greater analysis of the significance of recent trends toward increased participation in conventional politics, especially seen in the 2004 election.

- Deeper insights into the connections—and lack of connections—between involvement in community service and political engagement.

- Better documentation of emerging practices for engaging college students in public life, and especially on the role that colleges and universities can play in educating for democracy.

Ultimately, an updated understanding of the current generation of college students' views on politics requires more than a literature review; thus, we believe that updated research with college students could be timely, contributing an important element to the efforts for democratic revitalization: the voices of the youngest generation.

COLLEGE STUDENTS TALK POLITICS: REVISITING & REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

The strength of American democracy lies in an actively engaged citizenry—taking responsibility for building communities, solving public problems, and participating in the political and electoral processes. As a recent study of civic engagement put it, "To sustain itself, to meet challenges and thrive, democracy demands much from its citizens" (Keeter et al. 2002, 8).

Yet, many commentators have chronicled widespread civic disengagement in the American public and sounded alarm about the precipitous decline in the civic health of our nation. Whether measured by participation in community affairs, voter turnout, trust in institutions or people, the quality of public discourse, or attention to or knowledge of public affairs, Americans appear increasingly disconnected from each other and from public life.

In the words of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, we are becoming a "nation of spectators" (1998). Measuring trends over the past quarter century in political participation, political and social trust, associational membership, family integrity and stability, and crime, the bi-partisan Commission concluded that our overall civic condition is weaker than it was a generation ago:

> *During the past generation, our families have come under intense pressure, and many have crumbled. Neighborhood and community ties have frayed. Many of our streets and public spaces have become unsafe. Our public schools are mediocre for most students, and catastrophic failures for many. Our character-forming institutions are enfeebled. Much of our popular culture is vulgar, violent, and mindless. Much of our public square is coarse and uncivil. Political participation is at depressed levels last seen in the 1920s. Public trust in our leaders and institutions has plunged* (1).

Robert Putnam echos this crisis in our civic health in his groundbreaking work, Bowling Alone (2000). Drawing on vast survey data that report on Americans' changing behavior over the past twenty-five years, Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and social structures, whether the PTA, church, recreation clubs, political parties, or bowling leagues. He warns that this skrinking access to "social captial"—the basic building blocks of community and civic health—is a serious threat to our civic and personal health.

These commentators have also warned that this civic decay bodes ill for the future of our democracy if it is reproduced in the younger generations. The youngest generation is a significant and growing demographic. In 2000, the estimated population of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 was 42.2 million, and in the coming years will grow to rival the size of the baby boomer generation (Lopez 2002). More specifically for the purposes of this review, the U.S. Department of Education reports that college enrollment hit a record level of 17.1 million in fall 2004, and enrollment is expected to increase by an additional 14 percent between 2004 and 2014. Further, 1-in-3 of the more than 13 million undergraduates attends a two-year educational institution (U.S. Census 2003). And while access to higher education continues to be an issue of major public concern, in October 2004, 66.7 percent of high school graduates from the class of 2004 were enrolled in colleges or universities, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Significant survey data indicates that civic disengagement is especially pronounced among our nation's youth. As Putnam (2000) observed, there is a "generation gap in civic engagement," with each generation accelerating "a treacherous rip current" of civic disengagement (35). Americans growing up in recent decades vote less often than their elders, pay less attention to politics, and show lower levels of social trust and knowledge of politics (Bennett and Craig 1997; Keeter et al. 2002).

In addition to civic disengagement, contemporary critics have also decried a closely related phenomenon—the excessive individualism of contemporary American culture that has created a society which is increasingly polarized and fragmented, with little sense of being united by shared values, or of participation for the commonwealth (Boyte 2004; Putnam 2000). Goals of personal advancement and gratification dominate the younger generations, frequently at the expense of broader social, moral, and spiritual meaning (Kellogg 2001). This mounting disengagement and individualism bodes ill for the future of American democracy, unless, of course, the new generations are encouraged to see both the value and necessity for civic and political engagement (Gibson 2001; Keeter et al. 2002).

THE SILENT GENERATION? THE ALIENATED COLLEGE STUDENT

Many researchers, with significant funding from foundations, have focused on the college student demographic to assess the civic and political health of the nation's new generations. Results show a generation that is both disconnected from conventional politics, and yet has much civic potential. There is widespread evidence, along with a general characterization in the media, that college students today are cynical and apathetic about politics, with commentators even lamenting the return of the "silent generation" of college students of the 1950s (Bennett and Bennett 2001). A host of survey data seems to confirm this grim analysis—which is similar to some of the findings from the focus groups in the early 1990s that led to the publication of College Students Talk Politics (Harwood and Creighton 1993).

Carol Hays (1998) best categorizes this body of research: "Alienation—a catchall term combining cynicism, distrust, low efficacy, and apathy—is the most widespread characterization of this generation" (45). After a series of focus groups with college students in the 1990s, Hays concludes that this generation of college students is cynical and distrustful of government, apathetic and

indifferent toward public affairs, unknowledgeable about politics, self-centered, and generally unconcerned with society.

Perhaps the most direct way to measure this apathy is through participation in electoral politics through voting. Not to vote, many argue, is to withdraw from the responsibilities of democracy. Moreover, like the proverbial canary in the mine, voting is an instructive measure of broader social trends. Since young people earned the right to vote in 1971, however, electoral turnout among 18-24 year olds has repeatedly been the lowest of any age group and has been declining with each election, dropping from 42 percent in 1972 to 28 percent in 2000 (National Association of Secretaries of State 1999). The National Association of Secretaries of State's New Millennium Project (1999) studied the political attitudes of 15-24 year-olds and dramatically concluded, "America is in danger of developing a permanent non-voting class" (9). The study argued that young people lack interest, trust, and knowledge about American politics, politicians, and public life—and are generally cynical about America's future.

Similarly, in The Vanishing Voter, Thomas Patterson (2002) noted, "Today's young adults are less politically interested and informed than any cohort of young people on record" (21). His study of citizen involvement in presidential elections concluded that the period between 1960 and 2000 marks the longest decline in turnout in the nation's history. Finally, in The Disappearing American Voter, Ruy Teixeira (1992) notes that although turnout has declined across all age groups since 1960, turnout decline has been the most rapid among voters under age 24, creating a widening age gap in participation.

Declining electoral participation, however, is merely the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from civic life. Political knowledge and interest in public affairs are also seen as critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement. As Putnam (2000) puts it, "If you don't know the rules of the game and the players and don't care

about the outcome, you're unlikely to try playing yourself" (35).

Again, survey research has demonstrated that young people are considerably less knowledgeable of and interested in political affairs. Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter (1996), for example, note that the average college graduate today knows little more about public affairs than did the average high school graduate in the 1940s. The National Assessment of Educational Program's "Civics Report Card for the Nation" reported that only one-in-ten young people ages 18-29 could name both their U.S. Senators, compared to one-in-five of those ages 30-45 and one-in-three of those over the age of 45 (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

These trends have been charted by the annual survey of freshman, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles since the mid-1960s, involving 250,000 matriculating college freshmen each year. In the more than three decades since the initiation of the survey, every significant indicator of political engagement has fallen by at least half (Galston 2003; Kellogg 2001; Mason and Nelson 2000). The survey reports, for example, that only 26 percent of students entering college expressed an interest in keeping up with political affairs—the lowest level reported since the survey was established in 1966, which was then reported at 58 percent (Galston 2003).

The National Association of Secretaries of State also found that only 26 percent of young people believed that "being involved in democracy and voting" is "extremely important" (1999). Similarly, Stephen Bennett and Eric Rademacher (1997) found that young people aged 18-30 to be less politically interested, knowledgeable, or active than those over 30.

College Students Talk Politics, a report prepared for the Kettering Foundation by The Hardwood Group in 1993, presents a unique perspective on the political alienation of college students by capturing the voices of college students themselves describing how they view politics and the political process (Harwood and Creighton 1993). Based on in-depth discussions with college students on ten college campuses across the country, separately supported by quantitative research on a single campus (Gastil 1993), this report explores: what students think about politics, how they have come to learn what they know about politics and citizenship, and how they would like to see politics practiced. The study found that most everything college students have learned, and most everything they see and hear involving politics, makes them believe that it is not about solving problems; instead, politics is individualistic, divisive, negative, and often counterproductive to acting on the ills of society. Some of the students' statements present a bleak view: "I think our political system is becoming impotent;" "Politics is irrelevant;" and "I just think it is a system I'd never want to be a part of." Due to the pessimism of politics-as-usual, many students have concluded that politics is irrelevant and have decided to altogether withdraw from politics.

A CHANGING TIDE? INCREASED POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND MORE TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

While there is much data supporting the pessimism of student engagement in politics, recent data indicates momentum for a changing tide. There has been an increase in political activity among college students in the past few years, seen most vividly in political participation and youth voter turnout in the 2004 election. A study by Harvard University's Institute of Politics in 2003 found that 82 percent of college students planned to vote in the 2004 General Election, 81 percent said their vote will matter, and 45 percent were closely following the election. Moreover, 21 percent (up from 7 percent in 2002) said they had participated in a political organization, and 35 percent attended a political rally (2003).

Supporting this pre-election data, a study conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

(CIRCLE) found that a vast majority of college students were active in the 2004 election. Researchers found that 85 percent of college students closely followed the campaign, nearly 75 percent discussed politics weekly, nearly 90 percent said they were registered, and 77 percent said they voted. Moreover, voter mobilization was high as political parties and student groups actively registered student voters, and an impressive 62 percent of college students said they encouraged someone else to register to vote (Neimi and Hammer 2004).

CIRCLE and others have also found that young people are more trusting in government. For example, a February 2006 AP-Ipsos poll found a little more than half the under-30 respondents—52 percent—said they were confident federal money for the Gulf Coast recovery was being spent wisely, much higher than all other age groups—only 33 percent. "Young people are less anti-government or less distrustful of government than older people are," explains Peter Levine, the director of CIRCLE. Levine continues, "[T]he millenials have a relatively sunny attitude toward things" (as cited in Pearson 2006).

These findings are similar to those from The Civic and Political Health of the Nation (Keeter et al. 2002). This survey researching civic and political attitudes among the various generations found large majorities of young people agree with the statements: "Government should do more to solve problems" (64%), "Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest" (65%), and "Government often does a better job than people give it credit for" (65%). While it might be argued that these optimistic views on government, which are much higher than for older generations, are partly due to different levels of information, they are an important indicator of the positive civic attitudes of young people.

Recent data from Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) indicates other areas where an increase in political involvement has occurred in recent years beyond voting and trust in

government. HERI's survey of incoming freshman from 2003 indicates that political awareness among college students rose for the third year in a row, to the highest level since 1994. HERI's data indicates that students are becoming more interested in "keeping up to date with political affairs" (33.9 percent, as opposed to the record low of 28.1 percent in 2000) and "influencing the political structure" (20.1 percent, as opposed to record low of 17.1 percent in 1999) (Young and Hoover 2004). "For so many years we were reporting plummeting political interest," Linda Sax, the director of the survey commented. But, she added optimistically, "Students are definitely becoming more interested in the political scene" (as cited in Young and Hoover 2004, A30).

Anne Blackhurst (2002) found a similar increase in student political participation in recent years through a study of undergraduate students at three Midwestern institutions in late 1996 and late 2000. Her questionnaires demonstrated that current students are more interested in politics (58.1 percent in 1996, to 60.8 in 2000), believed voting was a civic duty (76.3 percent in 1996, to 81.8 percent in 2000), and were less cynical and apathetic (57.2 percent believed their vote mattered in 1996, to 61.2 percent in 2000). The results of this study suggest that college students may not be as cynical about politicians and the political process as the conventional wisdom suggests.

Other data collected by the Institute of Politics at Harvard (2003) is also promising. For instance, in the 2003 survey, more than 80 percent of students believed political engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing the country and their community, and 71 percent believed politics was relevant to their lives (2003). Students also expected to become more active in politics in the future, as 64 percent expected to be more involved in politics than their parents.

This recent upswing in political participation among college students is certainly welcome and has led to speculation about the causes, including

increasing interest in global and political affairs following September 11, 2001 (Kantrowitz and Naughton 2001; Lange 2002); savvy organizing efforts on college campuses by student groups, political parties, and foundations with the largest non-partisan youth vote efforts alone—the New Voters Project, Rock the Vote, Declare Yourself, WWE Smackdown Your Vote!, and Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN)—devoting approximately $40 million dollars to a multi-faceted campaign to mobilize young voters (Hampson 2004; Markelin 2002); and simply the cyclical nature of involvement by different generations in public life (Howe and Strauss 1994). Howe and Strauss (1994) even posit that the current college students (born after 1982)—the new "Millennial kids"—will become America's next 'civic' generation (40). The Scissor Effect: An Upsurge in Community Service

An important element of the civic promise of this generation is their involvement in and passion for community. While researchers continued to find declining political involvement since the 1970s among young people, a scissor effect was occurring, with surging interest in community involvement—seen most acutely in the increase in participation by young people in community service and service-learning (Galston 2003; Sax et al. 2003). Thus, the years of decline in political participation coincided with an unprecedented high rate of involvement in community service among college students, and young people more generally.

A series of studies have documented that while college students see politics as corrupt, irrelevant, and unresponsive, they tended to try to make change through community service (Civic Mission of Schools 2003; Institute of Politics 2002; Keeter et al. 2002; Sax 2000). While data on volunteering tends to vary widely, more than 75 percent of high school seniors reported volunteering in 2001, compared with 62 percent in 1976 (Lopez 2004).

Moreover, a number of important national organizations emerged to support this trend.

The 1980s saw the founding of organizations originally meant to promote community service and volunteerism among college students. A national organization founded by recent college graduates, Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), and a membership organization of college presidents, Campus Compact, were formed in the mid-1980s to counter the dominant stereotypes in the 1980s that students were part of the "me generation," and to give students the opportunity to make positive changes in communities through community service. These organizations continue to grow, as Campus Compact now has more than 950 member campuses and 31 state offices, while COOL has merged with Idealist.org and continues to offer a national conference for thousands of college students each year.

These, and other efforts, have had a tremendous impact. The Institute of Politics found that college students are engaged in their community, even if they are not involved in political activities. Nearly 66 percent volunteered recently in their community and more than 40 percent volunteered at least a few times per month, while fewer than 10 percent volunteered on a political campaign. Moreover, 85 percent of students believed volunteerism is an effective form of public service to solve problems on both local and national level (Institute of Politics 2002).

The most recent HERI data support these findings and show record increases in commitment to social and civic responsibility among our youth. According to the 2005 survey, two-out-of-three (66.3 percent) entering freshman believe it is essential or very important to help others who are in difficulty, the highest this figure has been in the past 25 years. Further, an all-time high of 83.2 percent volunteered at least occasionally during their high school senior year and 70.6 percent typically volunteered on a weekly basis. Turning from the past to the future, the survey also reported an all-time high of 67.3 percent of students who indicated they will volunteer in college. Students are not only interested in helping others through service; they believe it is important

to personally take action at different levels. Approximately one-in-four (25.6 percent) believes it is important to participate in community action programs (the highest since 1996), 33.9 percent regard becoming a community leader important, and 41.3 percent believe it is important to influence social values (HERI 2005).

"At first glance, this contradiction seems odd, since one might suspect that greater involvement in volunteer work would parallel a growth in political awareness," comments Linda Sax (2000), director of the HERI survey. "However, it is quite possible that students are simply placing their energies where they feel they can make a difference" (15). Indeed, this unprecedented rise in community service demonstrates that young people care about their community and are seeking concrete ways to make a difference. Even Putnam (2000) notes, "The ingenuity and idealism of the younger generations represent a potent resource for civic renewal" (133). This ingenuity, as least partially, is illustrated through their involvement in community-based work. Seemingly contradictorily, this generation exhibits moral idealism combined with political cynicism (Cone, Cooper and Hollander 2001).

AN ALTERNATIVE TO POLITICS: DEBATING THE (LACK OF) CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SERVICE AND POLITICS

Of course, this increasing involvement in community service among college students has been of significant interest to scholars and policy makers interested in the health of American democracy. Many have since found that community service is no panacea. Simply put, the dominant concepts and practices within the community service movement present limitations for increasing political engagement. Community service, it is argued, is based on apolitical notions of volunteerism with too few efforts to link involvement in community with notions of power (Boyte 2004). Students therefore tend to believe that engagement with the political process is unimportant and irrelevant for change and that community service is a more effective way to

solve public problems. Students, thus, often see community service as an "alternative to politics."

Many critics observe that an emphasis on "serving needs" illustrates an approach that asks people with privilege or professional expertise to act as "charitable helpers," not reciprocal partners in community renewal. This disempowering approach often hides the power issues among volunteers, nonprofit professionals, and the people they "serve." One of the most vocal critics of this approach, John McKnight (1995), points out the role community service plays in creating an industry of professionals whose very jobs rely on having community deficiencies—and sees people in communities for their deficits, rather than their assets.

Service also does not recognize the necessity of politics and power. For example, Harry Boyte (2004) contends that service routinely "neglects to teach about root causes and power relationships, fails to stress productive impact, ignores politics, and downplays the strengths and talents of those being served" (12). Moreover, the paradigmatic stance of service, Boyte argues, is the "outside expert." Boyte (1991) also points out that service "does not teach the political skills that are needed to work effectively toward solving society's problems: public judgment, the collaborative exercise of power, conflict resolution, negotiating, bargaining, and holding others accountable" (766).

And while it was assumed that service-learning programs would lead to greater political participation, the evidence for this is unclear (Galston 2001). David Mathews (1996) writes, "Service programs, although filled with political implications that bright students are likely to recognize, tend to be kept carefully distanced from political education." It is, therefore, "difficult to say what effect, if any, these service programs have on civic education" (271).

Further fueling the debate about the connections between community service and political participation is the issue of incentives

for young people to be involved with community service, as opposed to political participation. It is clear that colleges and universities offer a multitude of opportunities for volunteering in communities, with endowed centers, service-learning courses, and even some majors and minors in public service. For example, today more than 83 percent of Campus Compact member schools have an office of community service or service-learning, up from only 50 percent ten years ago (Longo et al. 2005).

At the same time, colleges and universities offer implicit and explicit incentives to be involved in community service—not least of which is the criteria for admissions. A recent study from CIRCLE illustrated the power of these incentives in finding that "resume padding" is a major reason that young people volunteer. One of the authors of the study, Lew Friedland, writes, "Much of the reported volunteerism was shaped by the perception that voluntary and civic activity is necessary to get into any college; and the better the college (or, more precisely, the higher the perception of the college in the status system) the more volunteerism students believed was necessary" (Friedland and Morimoto 2005).

These incentives and support are welcome and significant, but also beg the question: What would happen if colleges and universities put the same effort into promoting public work?

AN EMERGING ALTERNATIVE POLITICS: CITIZEN POLITICS THAT IS NOT CALLED "POLITICS"

What stands out to me is that our students see the whole question of civic engagement, and its connection to service, quite differently from those of us who philosophize about the connections. On many of our campuses students who are engaged in significant community-based work are deepening their learning about the issues that matter to them. They are getting to know their neighbors, to work with people across differences of race, gender,

class, religion, and interest. And they are challenging faculty to do more than pay lip service to civic engagement, by bringing their practices in the classroom and/or community into sync with democratic values. I would call this significant "civic engagement" learning, and yet, most studies fail to unearth this aspect of student learning and community service.
                                   - Richard Battistoni, 2003

There is a strand of literature, along with a growing movement on college campuses in the public work tradition, which begins to define a different kind of politics. This "politics that is not called politics" (Mathews 1994) enables students to find participatory, inclusive, open, creative, and deliberative ways of addressing public problems. As David Mathews noted in its forward, elements of this alternative politics were certainly present in College Students Talk Politics in the early 1990s—and they have only grown more pronounced over the past decade.

For instance, in 2001, 33 college students met at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, WI to discuss their "civic experiences" in higher education. This conversation led to the student-written New Student Politics, which forcefully argues that student work in communities is not an alternative to politics, but rather an "alternative politics." This new politics enables students to blend the personal and the political while addressing public issues through community-based work. While many of the students at Wingspread expressed frustration with politics-as-usual, they were not apathetic or disengaged. To the contrary, they point out that what many perceive as disengagement may actually be a conscious choice; they argued that, in fact, many students are deeply involved in non-traditional forms of engagement. These students saw their "service politics" as the bridge between community service and conventional politics, combining public power with community and relationships. This

different approach to politics connects individual acts of service to a broader framework of systemic social change.

The students at Wingspread (Long 2002) noted that they see democracy as richly participatory; that negotiating differences is a key element of politics; that their service in communities was done in the context of systemic change; and that higher education needs to do more to promote civic education. Furthermore, the students proclaimed, "We see ourselves as misunderstood by those who measure student engagement by conventional standards that don't always fit our conceptions of democratic participation" (v.). The New Student Politics concludes by quoting E.J. Dionne's (2000) analysis that, "the great reforming generations are the ones that marry the aspirations of service to the possibilities of politics and harness the good work done in local communities to transform a nation" (20). The students, it seems, are part of a long tradition of younger generations casting a new civic identity and new way of thinking and acting for the public good.

This "new student politics," writes Harry Boyte (2004a), is a "sign that today's students in American colleges and universities are beginning to think and act politically, as organizers for change" (85). A series of public declarations and national campaigns on college campuses further illustrate this trend toward students acting as political organizers for an alterative politics. For instance, following up on the Wingspread Conference, Campus Compact launched a national campaign to get college students more involved in public life called Raise Your Voice. Over the past four years, students on more than three hundred college campuses have been involved in mapping civic assets on campuses, hosting dialogues on campuses and in communities on public issues, and organizing for social change (Longo 2004).

As part of this effort, students from campuses across several states, including Oklahoma, Michigan, Maine, and West Virginia,

have written "civic declarations" calling upon policy makers and leaders in higher education to better support student political engagement (see www.actionforchange.org). Among the lessons from this civic engagement campaign is that students prefer "political engagement," rather than "politics" to describe the various strategies students use within the public realm to create change (Raill and Hollander 2006).

Students also have been involved in promoting deliberative democracy on college campuses around the country as part of curricular and co-curricular activities (Gastil and Levine 2005). Through this "public making" experience, for example, students at Wake Forest University participate in deliberative forums on issues such as hate speech, race relations, and public education as an essential component of their academic coursework (McMillan and Harriger 2002); students involved in fraternities at Miami University's Fraternal Futures project address difficult issues about the future of Greek life using National Issues Forum choice work (Roberts and Huffman 2005); and students in Michigan hosted forums, with faculty and civic leaders, on the topic of "What is College for?" as part of a broader conversation on the role of higher education in Michigan.

On a smaller scale, the International Instituted for Sustained Dialogue is working to promote intensive, sustained dialogue on several college campuses, including Princeton University and the University of Virginia. Through this project, students come together in a safe space over the course of a year to discuss and then act upon divisive issues, such as race relations, that are not often discussed in public (see www.sdcampusnetwork.org).

Recent examples of campus activism also demonstrate the growth of an alternative politics among college students. The much-celebrated living wage campaign at Harvard University owes much of its political success to the service done by students. Students involved in the political organizing campaign began by conducting

oral histories of the campus workers to build relationships and document their stories. The campaign, which ultimately included a three-week sit-in, daily press events, and visits from national leaders, led to the creation of a living wage committee and a significant raise for workers. Similar campaigns have been waged on dozens of campuses across the country (Wilgoren 2001).

In related activism on campus, some students are using their consumer power as a political tactic on campuses around the country, in a return to a strategy successfully employed in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and in efforts to end apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. For example, students have successfully pressured campuses, including Harvard, Brown, Yale, Stanford, and the entire University of California system, to divest their endowment from companies doing business in Sudan in an attempt to put financial strain on the Sudanese government in response to the genocide in Darfur (Rucker 2005). Similarly, students are also organizing boycott campaigns against Taco Bell, Coca Cola, Nike, and other companies to protest socially irresponsible business practices. These organized efforts to use consumer power to make change, it is worth noting, fit the trend which surfaced in the The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: namely, the surprising finding that a large percentage of young people (more than one-third) are engaged in some sort of consumer activism, an "unexplored path of engagement" that includes boycotting or purchasing based on the a company's practices (Keeter et al. 2002).

Perhaps the most celebrated example of organized consumer activism comes from the anti-sweatshop campaigns that have emerged where students, often working with local communities, are demanding that universities follow a code of conduct and refuse to do business with corporations that use sweatshop labor. One of the earliest campaigns took place at Duke University. Former Duke President Nannerl Keohane speculates that the protests at Duke, asking that university apparel manufacturers provide a living wage

and independent monitoring of their workers, grew out of the community service work of Duke students. "This generation is one where there's a strong sense of personal responsibility to make a difference for immediate, real people you can see and touch," Keohane said, adding, "My own hunch, as a political theorist, is this sweatshop movement is a direct outgrowth of this practical mindset" (as cited in Greenhouse 1999, A14).

These examples of organizing on college campuses are also supported by other commentators and researchers (Hart Research Associates 1998; Loeb 1994; Rimmerman 2005). In Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation, Neil Howe and William Strauss (2000) argue that the "Millennials" (born after 1982) are optimists, cooperative team players, results-oriented, and believe in the future and see themselves as its cutting edge. Based on their High School Class of 2000 survey, they demonstrate that Millennials are hard at work on a grassroots reconstruction of community, teamwork, and civic spirit in the realms of community service, race and gender relations, politics, and faith. "A new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notion of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds" (216). These young people have a "very strong sense of the common good and of collective social and civic responsibility" (231). "Over the next decade, the Millennials will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged – with potentially seismic consequences for America," Howe and Strauss conclude, adding, "Millennials have a solid chance to become America's next greatest generation" (5).

A NEED FOR BETTER POLITICAL EDUCATION AND MEDIATING STRUCTURES

We declare that it is our responsibility to become an engaged generation with the support of our political leaders, education institutions, and society.
...

The mission of our … higher education institutions should be to educate future citizens about their civic as well as professional duties. We urge our institutions to prioritize and implement civic education in the classroom, in research, and in services to the community.
…
And, we, as young citizens, must take advantage of civic education to learn and practice our responsibilities and privileges. We must determine how to effectively link our commitment to service with politics.
- Oklahoma Students' Civic Engagement Declaration, 2003

The Oklahoma Students' Civic Engagement Declaration, excerpted above, is a profound civic commitment and a call for institutions of higher education to do a better job educating students for democracy. The declaration, signed by students from 18 public and private institutions and two- and four-year schools in Oklahoma, was presented to the governor, members of the state legislature, college presidents, and Oklahoma Board of Regents. This student declaration, and others like it, emphasizes a consistent argument in the literature on student political participation: namely, that college students have a great potential to be politically engaged, but there needs to be better civic education, and higher education must to do a better job offering opportunities for public engagement.

This was certainly the finding from The Civic and Political Health of the Nation report (Keeter et al. 2002), which asserted that colleges and universities can be successful mediators by providing opportunities for open, deliberative discussions and other civic work. Similarly, Jill McMillan and Katy Harriger's (2002) research on deliberation at Wake Forrest University found that college students can be taught to imagine and implement a new kind of politics through

deliberation.

Harry Boyte (1991; 2000) has also made this argument for many years. Building on the success of the Center for Democracy's youth civic education initiative, Public Achievement, Boyte (2000) argues that young people need to play critical and energizing roles for any democracy movement and that "civic education will need to deepen and spread as a robust craft, not simply a skill set or instruction in civic information or education about relatively static roles" (69).

Finally, Cynthia Gibson (2004), former program officer at the Carnegie Corporation of New York's Strengthening Democracy program, notes that today's youth are committed to developing new models of public problem-solving. Based on her experience as a funder, she argues for moving beyond mobilizing for elections toward promoting citizen engagement in public work and community problem-solving. Gibson suggests a series of proposals, including promoting projects that allow young people to move from service to civics; encourage deeper school-based civic education; and sponsor public discussions on "what kind of political system we want."

CONCLUSION: TRENDS AND EMERGING RESEARCH AREAS

Our review of the literature also makes clear that while much research has been done on college student political engagement in the past decade, there are many interesting and important areas for future inquiry. Among interesting trends in need of further exploration:

- More robust understanding of the emerging movement among college students to define an alternative politics that is more participatory, inclusive, open, creative, and deliberative—a trend first noted in the forward to College Students Talk Politics, which has only grown in the decade since.

- Greater analysis of the significance of recent trends toward increased participation in

conventional politics, especially seen in the 2004 election.

- Deeper insights into the connections—and lack of connections—between involvement in community service and political engagement.

- Better documentation of emerging practices for engaging college students in public life, and especially on the role that colleges and universities can play in educating for democracy.

While survey data on college students is important to set a baseline, this data often fails to allow young people to define their politics for themselves, using their own language, and in their own words. That is why focus group data similar to that which emerged from College Students Talk Politics just more than a dozen years ago, and student writings, such as *The New Student Politics*, are so important. By listening to the political voices of students we are able to unearth lessons that are unseen in the dominant research models and approaches. Moreover, an updated understanding of the current generation of college students' views on politics requires more than a literature review; thus, we believe that updated research with college students could be timely, contributing an important element to the efforts for democratic revitalization: the voices of the youngest generation.

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