



Why Care about Producing Civic-minded Graduates?

By Robert G. Bringle, Center for Service and Learning

One of the criticisms of contemporary American higher education is that it has overly commodified the nature of the enterprise. There is heavy pressure to use business models to analyze, evaluate, and model operations in the academy. This is accompanied by concern about the preparation of students for jobs and how campuses are contributing to economic development. With the heavy representation of professional schools at IUPUI, you might expect the focus on technical preparation of students to be particularly salient. What is the purpose of civic engagement at IUPUI and to what extent do IUPUI faculty endorse the civic mission of IUPUI?

In 2002, IUPUI made the bold move to change its mission statement from, generally speaking, a focus on teaching, research, and service to a statement that read teaching, research, and civic engagement. IUPUI might have been the first institution of higher education in America to incorporate the phrase "civic engagement" in its mission statement, although many other institutions would have very similar phrases in their mission statements. IUPUI's mission statement was affirmed by the IU Board of Trustees as part of the university-wide mission differentiation process. Civic engagement at IUPUI is viewed as encompassing teaching, research, and service *in and with* the community.

Within a climate of professional education for careers, what is the extent to which the IUPUI campus community gives support to civic engagement? What percent of the IUPUI faculty do you think would endorse the following items?

1. Preparing students for responsible citizenship should be an integral part of the undergraduate experience.
2. Faculty in my discipline have a professional obligation to apply their knowledge to problems in society.

In the Center for Service and Learning, we assume that the goal of civic engagement, and particularly service learning, is to enhance the civic education of students; all students, both graduate and undergraduate. For, as David Mathews at the Kettering Foundation noted, "Why do we need more than a vocational education? In part, because we live more than a vocational life: we live a larger civic life and we have to be educated for it."

Civic-mindedness refers to a person's inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community. Thus, the concept refers to a person's orientation toward the community and other people in the community (as distinct from an internal or self orientation, family orientation, or a corporate/profit orientation). We assume that civic-mindedness includes: (a) academic knowledge, (b) knowledge of volunteering and nonprofit sector, (c) knowledge of social issues, (d) communication skills, (e) diversity skills, (f) self-efficacy, and (g) intentions to be civically involved. We assume that all forms of educationally-meaningful community service by faculty, staff, and students, can enhance civic-mindedness.

Who cares about IUPUI producing civic-minded graduates? Evidently the IUPUI faculty do. Based on over 1,000 responses to an IMIR faculty survey, 90% endorsed ("agree" or "strongly agree") the first item and 87% endorsed the second item.