

A Natural Disaster of Civic Proportions: College Students in the Natural State Fall Short of the Naturalization Benchmark

Professional Development Grant Final Report

Michael Rogers

Project Director

Witherspoon 255

968-0447

mrogers6@atu.edu

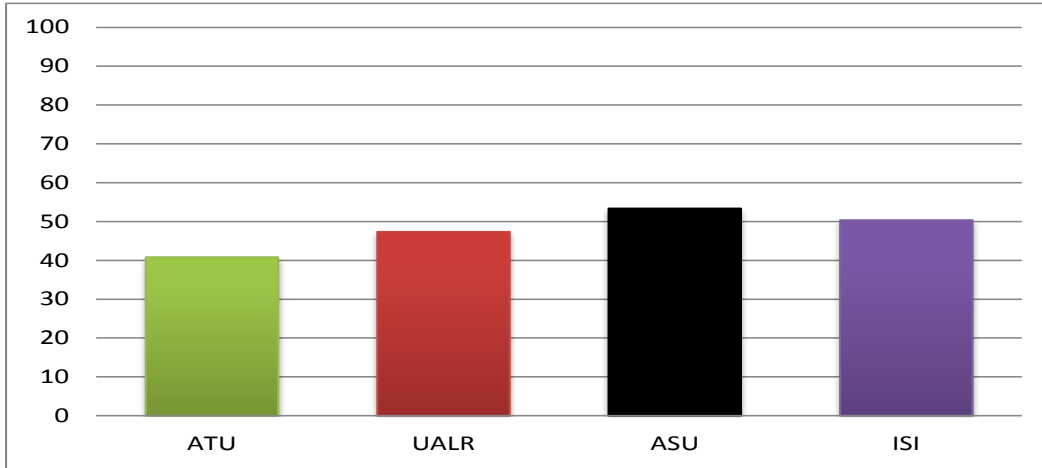
B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I used the funds from the Fall 2011 professional development grant for a professional enhancement activity and to fund a student worker for data entry. Primarily, the funds were used for my attendance of one of the major regional conferences for the discipline of political science held January 11-14, 2012. At the Southern Political Science Association's annual meeting in New Orleans, LA, Dr. Donald Gooch and myself presented our recently published work, "A Natural Disaster of Civic Proportions: College Students in the Natural State Fall Short of the Naturalization Benchmark." Additionally, much of the data presented in the paper was entered by Logan Huffman. Logan was the student worker we were able to hire with the remainder of the funds from the professional development grant.

C. Brief review of the Professional Enhancement Opportunity

In January, Donald Gooch and I presented our paper, "A Natural Disaster of Civic Proportions: College Students in the Natural State Fall Short of the Naturalization Benchmark" at the Southern Political Science Association's annual conference. Our colleagues were particularly receptive to our findings, as we provided further evidence that civic literacy is poor in America. Figure 1 below demonstrates the general findings of our cognitive assessment of ATU students. They averaged answering about 4 of every 10 civics questions correctly.

Figure 1: Civic Literacy Score Mean Comparison: State & National Data



However, the more interesting finding from our research is that, contrary to the conventional view among scholars, addition course work in civics *does matter*, at least in the short term. As Delli Carpini and Keeter explain, the conventional scholarly view is that additional levels of education generally do raise the civic literacy of students, additional instruction in civics courses specifically has no noticeable impact (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). While their work provides an additional challenge to this view, our findings further call it into question. Figures 7-10 demonstrate the substantial short-term improvement in civics literacy from the pre-test (given the first week in all American Government classes) and the post-test (given the last week of all American Government classes). While the number who meet the 60% or higher score for naturalization or passing, the improvement is substantial. For example, the pre- and post-test survey (N of 303) reveals 72% of the students improved their scores. More importantly, after taking the American Government course at ATU students on average improved their civic literacy score on the naturalization test by 8.93 points and 42.5% improved their civic literacy scores by over 10%. Finally, while almost 80% of the students failed the pretest, that percentage declines to about 52% in the posttest, a 30% improvement in the pass-rate.

Pretest – Posttest Grades

Figure 7: Pretest Civic Literacy Letter Grade Frequencies

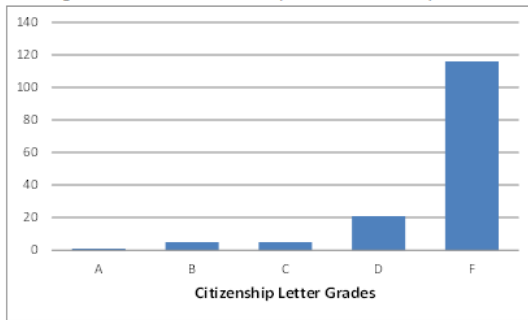


Figure 8: Posttest Civic Literacy Letter Grade Frequencies

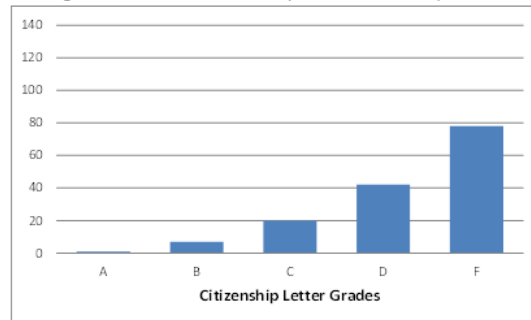


Figure 9: Pretest Civic Literacy Naturalization Bar Frequencies

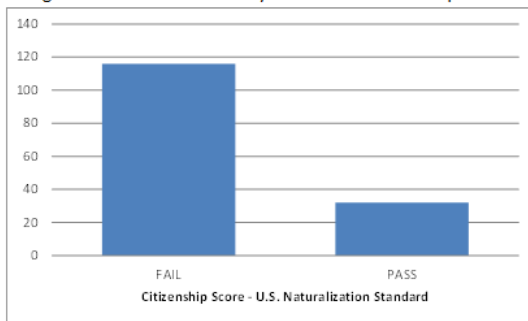
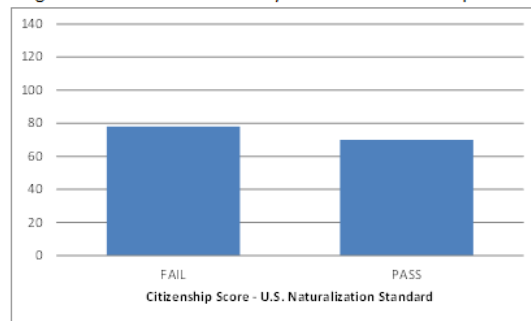


Figure 10: Posttest Civic Literacy Naturalization Bar Frequencies



As a result of our research and its positive reception by scholars in the field of political science, we have published an initial presentation of the findings in the *Midsouth Political Science Review* (Gooch and Rogers 2012). We also are continuing to collect data and plan to publish a more comprehensive paper that also looks at affective measures of civic participation in an edited volume on civic education. This will hopefully be out in Fall 2014.

D. Summary of Experiences

Attendance of the conference truly was a rewarding experience. Our article was part of the panel entitled, “Testing the Effectiveness of Civic Interventions for College Students.”

See online program link:

http://convention2.allacademic.com/one/spsa/spsa12/index.php?click_key=1&cmd=Multi+Search+Load+Session&session_id=149175&PHPSESSID=gmcsetph3ro9g5u8cdt6kgv6j6

The presentation received positive critical acclaim and I also recruited some of the other panelists to submit manuscripts for an edited volume on civic education I am putting together. Obviously, the networking I was able to do with other scholars interested in civic education made this a truly valuable experience.

Finally, since all the conference papers are housed electronically online, our article is able to reach a much wider scholarly audience than simply those who attended the conference.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

Given the interest our presentation received, the possibility for future publication through the networking at the conference, and the continued dissemination of the work through the online housing of the article, this professional enhancement activity was truly valuable in enhancing my scholarly career and the academic reputation of Arkansas Tech University.

Works Cited

- Delli Carpini, Michael, and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gooch, Don, and Michael T. Rogers. 2012. A Natural Disaster of Civic Proportions: College Students in the Natural State Falls Short of the Naturalization Benchmark. *Midsouth Political Science Review* 13 (1):54-82.