

EXPLORING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND STUDENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A
CONSTRUCTIVIST INQUIRY

by

JOEL HOUSTON SCOTT

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement through the perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of students. Utilizing a constructivist design, this combination interview and document (photo) analysis study examined a group of students who were civically engaged at one large, public research-extensive institution. Themes emerged from two separate sets of individual and photo-elicitation interviews that contribute to the emerging body of literature on institutional culture and student civic engagement. The positive impact of institutional culture on student civic engagement was three-fold. Students described how South East University (SEU) helped build upon their pre-college civic foundation by expanding their civic experiences through various opportunities, by expanding their understanding of what civic engagement means, and by expanding their sense of effectiveness and practice of civic engagement. Students expressed how the university was their primary community for civic engagement, which has implications for educators, as well as added weight and depth to the institutional messages students perceived about civic engagement.

Students perceived positive, negative, and mixed messages about civic engagement from their institution. The presence of civic engagement through on-campus venues and having

supportive relationships with other members of the institution were messages of institutional support for civic engagement. The negative messages were described as different forms of institutional neglect: neglect of student voice and inclusion; neglect of sufficient support; neglect of diversity integration; and the neglect of student friendly systems for civic involvement. Students shared that the strong emphasis on sports, the pursuit of institutional prestige, and the presence of excess and student consumption were mixed messages about the importance of civic engagement. The other mixed message represented the lack of visibility for civic engagement on-campus based upon a lack of promotion and emphasis.

Finally, the integration of service and civic learning within the curricular and co-curricular systems and institutional engagement among all members of the institution highlighted how students envisioned a campus culture focused on civic engagement. Research questions focused on impact, messages, and student voice, providing rich recommendations for centralizing, visualizing, and mobilizing a campus culture of student civic engagement.

INDEX WORDS: Institutional culture, Student civic engagement, Photo-elicitation interviews, Person-environment theories, Psychosocial development, Student voice, Constructivism, Research-extensive university

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this beloved book project to Becky, Emmi, and Kohen. Thank you for helping me laugh, praying me through deadlines, cheering me on when it seemed the end was not in sight, and most importantly, reminding me that family and the things of the spirit are more important than most things in life, including dissertations. Each of you will forever tug on my heart strings.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every institution of higher education should ask itself—now—what it proposes to do to assure that next year’s entering students will graduate as individuals of character more sensitive to the needs of community, more competent in their ability to contribute to society, and more civil in their habits of thought, speech, and action.

-Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993

Graduating civically engaged students who will contribute to and improve society has always been a goal of higher education and is evident in most university mission statements today (Boyer, 1987; Dewey, 1916; Elrich, 2000). Recently, national organizations such as the American Association of College and Universities (2002; 2006) have called upon institutions to focus on educating responsible learners who understand the importance of civic engagement and citizenship. Institutions that do not explicitly refer to their responsibility to educate students for citizenship do at least acknowledge some responsibility for it (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003). The responsibility of educating students for participation in civic engagement implies that civic values should be an integral part of educational practices and goals. Institutions that take the civic portion of their mission seriously often create environments and cultures in which students are challenged both civically and morally inside and outside the classroom (Colby et al., 2003.). Reviews of American higher education, however, have suggested that colleges may be failing in their responsibility to prepare students for civic roles and responsibilities (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 2001; Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993). These findings are of great concern to many educators and social researchers as recent reports indicate decreases in student civic engagement.

Research has pointed toward evidence of disengagement and apathy of college students as highlighted by a steady decline in voter participation with 18-24 year-olds (Cone, Cooper, & Hollander, 2001; Patterson, 2002). Social commentators have documented that Americans growing up in recent decades vote less frequently and have lower levels of political knowledge than their elders (Bennett & Rademacher, 1997; Putnam, 1995). Notable evidence of this trend was the record low voter turnout among young adults in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections (Colby, et al., 2003). In a series of national focus groups, college students depicted a divisive and pessimistic picture of politics, characterizing the government as ineffectual (Harwood & Creighton, 1993). Other studies describe students as politically disengaged and distrustful of the U.S. democratic processes that have led to an overall decline in political and civic involvement (Hays, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Putnam's research (2000) further indicated that younger generations have steadily moved away from community ideals and values, which he warns have grave social capital consequences. A number of social researchers have also documented the excessive individualism of U.S. culture and its negative consequences on younger generations. The increasing culture of consumption and individualism in contemporary society promotes a message of personal gain, pursuit of self-interests and personal gratification, and contradicts civic and moral values and practices (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991; Putnam, 1995; 2000).

In response to the national indications of a decline in student civic engagement, higher education's role and responsibility in preparing citizens has received renewed attention and emphasis (American Association of Colleges & Universities, 2002; Boyer, 1987; Campus Compact, 2006; Weigart, 1998; Wingspread, 1993). Universities have become more active in promoting civic engagement through curricular and co-curricular initiatives such as service-

learning, community service, diversity appreciation courses, and leadership development programs (Campus Compact, 2006; Colby et. al, 2003; O’Conner, 2006). Students in service-learning courses have widely reported that connecting disciplines with a community issue and project has positive effects on their sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). Students who are involved in co-curricular service organizations and service projects report similar experiences (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999).

National studies show increases in service and volunteer participation by entering first year college students. The Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP), a national study that examines trends in college students for the past 40 years, reported “record increases” in student responses to civic and social responsibility for first year students in 2006 (HERI, 2006). Of the 250,000 freshmen surveyed at several hundred colleges and universities nationwide, 66.3% believed it is essential or very important to help others in need, the highest percentage in 25 years. A high percentage of students also reported that they volunteered on a weekly basis (70.6%) and that they anticipate continuing their volunteer efforts in college (67.3%), both all-time records. More importantly, interest in community involvement has increased. More than 25 percent of the 2006 freshmen class indicated that it is essential or very important to participate in “community action programs,” the highest percentage in 10 years.

Although undergraduates’ rates of participation in service activities are increasing, studies indicate that undergraduate involvement in community service and other civic related activities does not seem to encourage deeper forms of civic and political engagement during college (Gray et al., 1999; Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 1999) and after graduation (Sax, 1999; Vogelsang & Astin, 2005). These findings suggest that there is much work to be done at institutions to instill students with civic values for life-long civic engagement.

Institutions offering programs, courses, and opportunities for students to experience civic engagement related outcomes is an important initiative; however, others have argued that the quality of a college education, especially undergraduate education, has diminished in respect to its capacity to influence students beyond competence toward commitment and action (Boyer, 1987). After a national survey of faculty and students and an extensive case study of several institutions, educational reformer Ernest Boyer concluded that a number of institutional factors complicate and challenge an institution's ability to graduate engaged citizens. Competing interests, confusion over mission and goals, and disciplinary ethnocentrism and fragmentations were issues and trends that contributed to a growing gap between colleges and society and impeded faculty and administrators interested in student civic and moral development from effectively promoting it (Boyer, 1987). Boyer's report suggested that institutions concerned with increasing student civic commitment and action need to focus on ways to ensure that institutional messages, cultures, and environments are congruent with its civic mission.

Highlighting Boyer's findings on competing institutional cultures and values that challenge the civic development of students is a striking review of a recent study on educating citizens. In his review of *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, Fish (2003), a postmodern literary theorist, described himself as "disheartened" by the authors because a professor's job, in Fish's opinion, is to teach his or her discipline and train students to be strong disciplinary researchers, not help students become "good people" (p. 1). According to Harkavy (2004), Fish's response is typical of the disciplinary ethnocentrism or allegiance that still dominates American universities and undermines what most university mission statements espouse to accomplish.

Fish perpetuates the fallacy pervasive on most American campuses that professors are only duty bound to their scholastic interests (Morton & Enos, 2002). This is problematic because pedagogies that promotes student civic engagement, such as service-learning, challenge the heart of disciplinary ethnocentrism by the emphasis on involvement outside the classroom and in the community. Unfortunately, as Billig and Welch (2004) acknowledged, objectivity in scholarship is still a deeply embedded value. Faculty members often view service, teaching, and research as distinctly separate activities, with service being traditionally viewed as unimportant in the culture of higher education (Billig & Welch). The prevalence of disciplinary ethnocentrism and its associated pressures across an institution is one of many examples of how institutional cultures may be giving students conflicting messages about the purpose of education.

Boyer's (1987) call for greater attention to the civic values of higher education is perhaps best captured in the following statement from his chapter that charges institutions to move beyond competence to commitment and action:

Throughout our study we were impressed that what today's college is teaching most successfully is competence—competence in meeting schedules, in gathering information, in responding well on tests, in mastering the details of a special field...But technical skill, of whatever kind, leaves open essential questions: Education for what purpose? Competence to what end? At a time in life when values should be shaped and personal priorities sharply probed, what a tragedy it would be if the most deeply felt issues, the most haunting questions, the most creative moments were pushed to the fringes of our institutional life. What a monumental mistake it would be if students, during the undergraduate years, remained trapped within the organizational grooves and narrow routines to which the academic world sometimes seems devoted. (p. 283)

In response to Boyer's seminal work and their recent study of institutions focused on student civic and moral development, Colby et al. (2003) make the following charge to educators:

If today's college graduates are to be positive forces in this world, they need not only to possess knowledge and intellectual capacities but also to see themselves as members of a community, as individuals with a responsibility to contribute to their communities...education is not complete until students not only have acquired knowledge but can act on that knowledge in the world. (p. 7)

Today, more than ever, Colby et al. (2003) challenge institutions to revisit the civic purposes of higher education. With an increase in global interdependence, increasing racial and ethnic diversity and related tensions, and the acceleration and complexity of social, economic, and political worlds, society needs a generation of students who are committed to civic engagement (Colby et al., 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Institutions of higher education have the resources, influence, and capacity to shape, develop, and inspire a new generation of students who can in turn reinvigorate the democratic spirit in America (Checkoway, 2001). Research on increasing student civic engagement is beginning to focus on the importance of creating an institutional culture or ethos of student civic engagement (Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Ehrlich, 2000; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006). The few existing studies on institutional culture and its influence or its collective press on student civic engagement, however, have been conducted through the lens of non-students. That is, investigations have focused primarily on the viewpoints and values of administrators, faculty, and those involved directly with promoting civic engagement programs, including their interpretations of the impact of institutional values, beliefs, rituals, and other cultural symbols on student civic engagement. The student lens has been given minimal attention. Because students are an important part of shaping institutional culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988), failing to understand how students perceive the impact of institutional culture on their civic engagement prevents educators from fully learning how institutions can enhance a culture that promotes student civic engagement. If institutions are serious about fostering a culture of student civic engagement and graduating engaged citizens, they need to examine how the student culture is impacted by student experiences while in college (Vogelsang & Astin, 2005).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how institutional culture impacted student civic engagement through the perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of students. Utilizing a constructivist design, this combination interview and document (photo) analysis study examined a group of students who were civically engaged at one large, public research-extensive institution. This study was largely exploratory and guided by the following research questions:

1. How does institutional culture impact student civic engagement?
2. What mixed messages, if any, do students perceive about civic engagement from their institution?
3. How do students describe an institutional culture that truly enhances student civic engagement?

Theoretical Framework of Study

This study was conceptually guided by the foundational belief that environments do impact behavior. Lewin (1936) originated the person-environment theory, which focused on how the dynamic interaction between individuals and environments produces certain behavioral outcomes. Confirming Lewin's theory, research on the impact college environments have on students' moral, intellectual, and psychosocial development has been well documented (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; 2005). Building on Lewin's person-environment theory, Strange and Banning (2001) provided a comprehensive framework for investigating institutional environments through the physical environment (symbols, artifacts, campus design), the human aggregate environment (different student, faculty, staff characteristics and cultures), the organizational environment (influences of organizational structures), and the constructed environment (specific impressions and perceptions of individuals). Strange and Banning's

framework provides a useful guideline for thoroughly examining students' perceptions as they relate to their relationship with institutions and their levels of civic engagement.

In addition, it is important to understand the concept of an environmental press. Pace and Stern (1958) were some of the first to define and describe environmental presses to human environments. They defined a "press" as "the characteristic demands or features of the environment as perceived by those who live in the particular environment" (p. 271). Environmental presses have often been described in other studies as an "ethos," reflecting a culture that heavily influences the behaviors, values, and practices on particular campuses (Kuh, Schuh, Kinzie, & Whitt, 2005; Kezar, 2007).

Student Civic Engagement and Importance of Study

Universities have defined civic engagement in many ways. In his book *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (2000) Thomas Elrich described civic engagement as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference" (p.vi). Civic engagement has been described as civic responsibility, civic involvement, civic development, activism, citizenship, political engagement, citizenship, democratic action, social justice, social responsibility, service-learning, community engagement, public leadership, civic professionalism, service, appreciation for diversity, and engaged scholarship. These are but a few of the descriptors, reflecting the inclusive nature and breadth of civic engagement in higher education (Battistoni, 2002; Gottlieb & Robinson, 2002).

Understanding students' interpretations and definitions of their own civic engagement is critical to understanding the impact culture has on student civic engagement, as recent literature has shown that students have differing viewpoints from educators on civic engagement practices

(Campus Compact, 2006; Raill & Hollander, 2006). Moreover, the student sample for this study is reflective of the diversity of civic engagement attitudes and behaviors and offered multiple viewpoints and perspectives.

“Raise Your Voice” (RYV), a student-led national campaign involving hundreds of institutions and thousands of college students, recently completed a three-year campaign focusing on student civic engagement (Campus Compact, 2006). Student leaders representing different states across the nation concluded that institutions need to create environments where students can explore and develop their own civic voices and take ownership of their engagement. As an extension to this challenge, student leaders described a campus environment that promotes an ethos or culture of civic values that permeates the entire campus:

On this imagined campus, respectful dialogue about public issues resonates through residence halls, public spaces, and classrooms. A sense of commitment and purpose is palpable among students, as well as among administrators, staff, and faculty. Students find ways to contribute to the public good that they enjoy and find fulfilling and that often intersect with their course of study. There is constant activity around campus as students and others work on service projects, advocacy campaigns, and community based research...staff members and administrators solicit and value students’ opinions. Because of these forums, students feel ownership of their education, and especially of their civic learning. Rather than a responsibility thrust upon them, the students see civic engagement as something they can choose and shape to fit their own lives and interests. Graduates of this school leave the campus as active and engaged citizens. As businesspeople, public servants, nurses, or chemists, these graduates bring a strong commitment to society into their field. Outside the workplace, they raise the quality of public dialogue, use their knowledge of public issues to hold their legislators accountable, and contribute to community improvement. They go on to build a society in which more people live in a respectful, responsible, and civil way (Raill & Hollander, 2006, p. 1).

Understanding how institutions can become more effective at instilling civic values in students and graduating engaged citizens requires examining how institutional cultures and environments impact the development of student civic engagement. This study endeavored to understand how civically engaged students are shaped by their institutional experiences.

Importance of Study to Student Affairs

In addition to the importance of understanding student civic engagement for higher education in general, this study is also important for professionals that work with college students every day for two primary reasons: (1) the promotion of student civic engagement is congruent with the history, values, and practice of the field; and (2) student affairs professionals work to create environments that enhance student engagement and learning.

Historically, student affairs has always been concerned with and focused on holistic student development, including moral, ethical, intellectual, and spiritual development (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education 1949; Brown, 1972). Civic engagement is also an element of holistic development (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2004) and a value that is congruent with the professional ethics and values of our field (ACPA, 2006). Advocating for students, celebrating individual differences, and promoting social justice are important to the practice and culture of student affairs practice (Kuh, Alden, & Thomas, 2001). Today, student affairs promotes student civic engagement through a number of co-curricular activities such as volunteer programs, student organizations, alternative spring break programs, leadership development, service-learning, learning communities, student government, multicultural programs, and philanthropic events.

Student affairs professionals focus on understanding not only student development and learning but also how college environments enhance student development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Research shows that environments do impact student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1991; 2005). In recent student affairs documents *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994) and *Learning Reconsidered*

(NASPA & ACPA, 2004) student affairs professionals are charged to understand student learning and development processes and to become experts on creating environments that positively impact students. As a professional in the field of student affairs, I believe this study is an important contribution to understanding students' perceptions of their college environments and will enhance the understanding of how college environments affect student civic engagement.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement through the perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of students. In order to lay the foundation for this study, this chapter first examines the different components of institutional culture. The historic role civic engagement has played in the mission and traditions of institutions within the United States is highlighted in this section. The mission and traditions related to the history of institutions with specific responsibilities to graduate engaged citizens are examples of cultural artifacts representative of institutional culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Second, this chapter examines related studies involving institutional culture and civic engagement. Studies of how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement has been given little attention, especially through the perceptions and interpretations of students who are civically engaged (Thorton & Jaeger, 2006). Third, this chapter reviews student development theories that are closely related to student civic engagement and examine how college environments impact the moral, psychosocial, and intellectual development of students. Finally, this chapter reviews the challenges in developing student civic values and engagement facing college cultures today.

Understanding Institutional Culture

Every institution of higher education has a particular way of doing things, a particular language for expressing and celebrating what is important through events, programs, and

academic ceremonies that distinguish it academically and culturally from other institutions. Institutions are social communities as well (Sanford, 1962). Colleges often function in a world of their own, acting similarly to a small city or town, and having a particular culture that expresses itself through the behaviors, values, and assumptions of the diverse groups and individuals that make up an institution (Kuh, et al., 2001). Throughout literature, culture has been defined in various ways, from “the social or normative glue that holds an organization together” (Siehl, 1985, p. 125) to a “process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in a distinctive ways” (Morgan, 1986, p. 128). Chaffee and Tierney (1988) described culture as it relates to institutions as “a social construction” reflected in stories, policies, practices, history, heroes, interaction among members, symbols, ceremonies, and mission (p.10). A universally accepted definition of culture is difficult to come by, however, given that it is so often “something that is perceived or something that is felt,” (Handy, 1976, p. 185) and is context bound (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The culture of institutions has long been a topic of research and interest (Clark, 1970; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Manning, 1989; Sanford, 1962; Strange & Banning, 2001).

In their seminal work on institutional cultures, *The Invisible Tapestry: Culture in American Colleges and Universities*, Kuh and Whitt (1988) described institutional culture as “persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provide a framework of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus” (p. IV). Kuh and Whitt’s definition of institutional culture embraces the holistic and evolving nature of culture, including the influence it can have on students, faculty, and other institutional members; this

inclusive definition is important as this study seeks to understand to what degree, if any, student civic engagement is influenced by institutional culture.

Components of Institutional Culture

It is not enough to have a working definition and general understanding of institutional culture in order to investigate its influence on student civic engagement. Culture of any kind, especially institutional culture, is complex and dynamic. Kuh and Whitt (1988) liken describing the culture of an institution to the process of peeling an onion. As one peels through the many layers, it becomes apparent that each layer is different in texture, and it becomes increasingly difficult to see where one layer ends and another one begins. Similarly, using cultural lenses to examine institutional culture and the behavior of institutional members, such as students, requires “multiple layers of analysis” (Kuh & Whitt, p. 41). Kuh and Whitt identified several features or “threads of institutional culture” emphasized in literature (p. 51). These features are: (1) historical roots, including religious convictions of founders and external influences (alumni, philanthropic sponsors); (2) the curricular emphases; (3) faculty, staff, and other institutional agents; (4) the social environment, particularly the influence of dominant student subculture(s); (5) manifestations of culture through artifacts, including architecture and physical arrangement of campus, customs, ceremonies, and rituals; (6) distinctive themes that reflect the institution’s core values and beliefs transmitted by the ethos, norms, and saga; and (7) founders or charismatic leaders. The concept of an institutional ethos has received attention in recent studies on campuses that are considered educationally effective (Kuh, Schuh, Kinzie, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Ethos is thought to be the “fundamental character or spirit of a culture that connects individuals to a group; it expresses a particular group’s values and ideology that creates an emotional connection” (Kezar, 2007, p. 13). Ethos is also thought of as “the life giving source

of an institution that touches the heart and engages the mind” (p. 14). In her analysis of institutions that are successfully promoting student success and engagement, Kezar (2007) found that the ethos of these institutions were often centered on themes such as family, student-centeredness, community, or civic leadership and responsibility.

Many disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, and ecology, have contributed to the intellectual foundations of culture, including a stronger understanding of institutional culture. Within cultural anthropology, two perspectives are of particular interest to this study: (1) ecological-adaptationism and (2) symbolism or semiotics. Ecological-adaptationism supports the view that culture and environments are inseparable and simultaneously shape one another. As such, “neither the institution’s culture nor the environment can be defined independent of each other; each influences the development of the other” (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 31). This is an important assumption guiding the theoretical framework of this study: students were questioned extensively about the institutional culture, including the many environments that make up an institution, which potentially has shaped or influenced their civic development. The symbolic or semiotic perspective views culture through the meanings constructed through symbols and signs. For example, institutions often hold special events, programs, or ceremonies such as convocation that provide both tangible and symbolic meaning for participants, which can potentially influence action and behavior (Geertz, 1973).

Constructivism, a paradigm anchoring qualitative research and this study’s methodology, purports that reality and meaning are socially constructed and interpreted by the individuals of a particular group (Merriam, 1998). In this case, students of institutions are provided with an array of opportunities to interact with the culture and environments that make up their institution; it is

within this dynamic interaction that students develop and make meaning of their experiences (Strange, 1999).

Environmental Components of Institutional Culture

As previously mentioned, the multiple environments present within an institution are contributing components of institutional culture and important to analyze in this study. Strange and Banning (2001) provided an extensive and comprehensive framework for auditing institutional environments, especially emphasizing the assessment of how effective the environments of an institution influence the learning and development of students. The physical, human aggregate, organizational, and constructed environments make up Strange and Banning's comprehensive framework.

Physical Environment

The physical environment of an institution encompasses the role and design of space and all physical structures, including buildings, signage, and other artifacts that impact human behavior. The influence of the physical environment on behavior is well documented in architectural theories and literature (Strange & Banning, 2001). Banning and Cunard (1986) noted that among the many components of facilitating student learning and development on college campuses, the physical environment is the most neglected and least understood. Strange and Banning contend that the physical environment of a college campus can encourage or discourage learning and development processes. Physical arrangements of institutions have the ability to communicate a sense of friendliness through places for socializing such as outdoor gathering spaces with benches, or portray the importance of learning and academic rigor through academic quotes on buildings and 24 hour student learning centers. Conversely, the "way-finding" and overall design of a campus library, for instance, may be so difficult to navigate as to

discourage student use, resulting in unnecessary frustration and confusion (Strange & Banning). Institutions can be proactive in using their physical arrangements to communicate desired student outcomes. The messages expressed through the physical artifacts of an institution can take many forms, signaling to students a sense of belonging and safety, and a sense of worth, value, and role (Banning & Bartels, 1993). For example, institutions may decide to post honor codes or related symbols in all classrooms and public study settings to communicate the role and responsibility that students have in promoting academic integrity and honor.

Publicizing specific initiatives through artifacts (newsletters or brochures to incoming first year students) is another way institutions use their physical properties to communicate what is important to an institution (Kezar, 2007). For instance, Harvard University sends a letter from the president to every incoming student expressing the importance of diversity and the expectation of diversity appreciation as part of the Harvard educational experience. Supporting this expectation, students are assigned to live with students of different backgrounds in a suite-style residential arrangement. Studies at Harvard have shown that most students, after the first-year required assignment, choose to live with the same students or intentionally choose to live with students from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds throughout the rest of their time in college (Light, 2001).

Human Aggregate Environment

The culture of an institution is shaped by the human characteristics and subcultures that make up the institution. The premise of the aggregate environment viewpoint is that often the dominant features of an environment are in part a function of the collective characteristics of groups and individuals who inhabit it (Holland, 1973; Moos, 1986). Several typological models have been developed to understand college student cultures. Clark and Trow (1966) were some

of the first to describe student subcultures on campuses. The Academic, the Nonconformist, the Collegiate, and the Vocational student subculture categories were created from an assessment of the extent to which students identify with ideas and with their institution.

Students who are a part of the Academic subculture take their studies very seriously, attend learning events, and focus much of their time on the intellectual life of the institution. Nonconformist students are students who value individualistic styles, self-awareness, and often have contempt for organized society; this sentiment may prompt a critical detachment from their institution (Walsh, 1973). These two subcultures share a high degree of focus on ideas yet differ in the degree with which they identify with their institution. The Collegiate student is greatly involved in extracurricular activities and student leadership and less involved, if not indifferent, to the intellectual opportunities of the institution outside the standard and required curricular activities. The Vocational student approaches education from a consumerist standpoint. These students are often focused on the ways their educational experiences are practical and relevant to future jobs. Clark and Trow (1966) contended that an institution's character is partially a function of one or more of these student typologies.

Over the past-half century, typology models utilized on college campuses have evolved to include personality types such as Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) (Myers, 1980), Holland's Theory of Vocational Identity (1985), and Kolb's Learning Styles (1983). Astin (1993) identified several types of student cultures from an analysis of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) national freshman survey, which assesses student behaviors, activities, expectations, and values. The seven student types Astin identified are the Scholars, Social Activists, Artists, Hedonists, Leaders, Status Strivers, and Uncommitted students. Like Clark and Trow, Astin's types of student cultures help describe the characteristics

of student aggregates on campus (Strange & Banning, 2001). For instance, “a predominance of Scholars would likely create an institutional emphasis on events and interests of an academic nature...in contrast, Social Activists and Artists would create, by their dominance on campus, an environmental influence toward social action and involvement” (Strange & Banning, p. 41). These and other typologies reveal a greater understanding of the human aggregate effects within an institutional environment and the importance of person-environment congruence and differentiation.

Application of theories and models of aggregate environments point toward the importance of examining subcultures within institutional culture. Exploring the degree to which student subcultures of a particular institutional culture impact student civic engagement is an important consideration. Specifically, understanding students’ perceptions of how their peers, student organizations, student leadership, etc. has or has not influenced the development of their civic engagement is one of the layers of culture that has been analyzed in this study.

Organizational Environment

Institutions are comprised of a diversity of institutional members, departments, divisions, and administrations, all of which contribute to the organizational culture of an institution through the administration of policies and delivery of educational experiences. With increased student access to and attendance at college over the past several decades, institutions of higher education have become increasingly bureaucratic, impersonal, and indifferent to meeting the needs of individual students (Strange & Banning, 2001). Institutions that support the civic portion of their mission effectively organize avenues to promote community partnerships, service-learning training and course offerings, and other institutional events and messages that encourage student civic engagement (Colby et. al, 2003). Faculty, student affairs staff, senior administration, and

other institutional members who lead organizational processes inside and outside the classroom shape and develop institutional culture, especially by aligning and maintaining practices and policies that are congruent and consistent with an institution's mission (Kezar, 2007; Kuh, et al., 2005).

Constructed Environment

The constructed environment is the fourth and final component of Strange and Banning's (2001) comprehensive environmental framework. Understanding campus environments from a cultural perspective focuses on the meaning of various events, traditions, symbols, stories, and relationships through the lenses of institutional members (in the case of this study, students) (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991). Understanding how students socially construct, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences at their institution is helpful in understanding how an institution influences its students. This includes understanding the double or mixed messages that institutions communicate to students and other institutional members. Because institutions encompass diverse and complex cultures, double messages are often an unfortunate reality (Strange & Banning, 2001). Double messages are conflicting or contradictory messages perceived by participants within particular environments. Institutions, for example, may communicate through orientation, events, and brochures the importance of academic rigor and learning yet close their libraries and study centers on football game days, leaving some students to believe that their institution is more concerned with athletics than academics (Strange & Banning). Later in this chapter, a section on challenges facing institutions will cover more on double messages

Within the constructed environment framework, Pace and Stern (1958) first developed the concept of an environmental press that they defined as "the characteristic demand or features

of the environment as perceived by those who live in the particular environment” (Walsh, 1973, p. 114). Academic climates, social climates, vocational climates, performance expectation, community, leadership, and self-expression are examples of environmental presses that have been examined at institutions, specifically within residence hall communities; they have all been shown to influence student behaviors (Strange & Banning, 2001). The concept of an “environmental press” is built upon Lewin’s (1936) person-environment theory that behavior outcomes are a result of the interaction between people and their environments. Of particular interest in this study is whether or not students perceive an institutional “press” toward student civic engagement.

History of Civic Engagement in Higher Education

Mission statements serve as an example of cultural artifacts intended to guide the values, traditions, behaviors, and work of any organization (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The vision of developing and graduating college students as citizens who are prepared to contribute to a democratic society is evident not only in the majority of institutions today but is an important value interwoven throughout the history of U.S. higher education (Colby, et al., 2003; Dewey, 1916).

The evolution of civic engagement in higher education began with institutions founded upon religious values and principles (Hofstadter & Smith, 1961). Public universities included language reflective of moral and character development as well (Yanowski, 2004). Faculty were not only teachers but mentors and advisors who imparted moral, intellectual, and religious values, ethics, and character to students (Kuh, et al., 2001). During this period, however, institutions of higher education were reserved for only the elite and wealthy members of society (McDowell, 2001). As the U.S. developed politically and expanded in population and resources,

the values, ideas, and resources of institutions expanded as well. Limited access to higher education and the need for institutions to better meet the needs of their local and state citizens was of great concern, which led to the creation of the Morrill Land-Grant Act in 1862 and the distribution of over 17 million acres (30,000 acres per senator and congressman in each state) committed to finance land-grant colleges. Higher education, once exclusive, was to become more inclusive: “The land-grant view of scholarship directly challenged the prevailing norms of higher education at the time of their inception by making the work of cow barns, kitchens, coke ovens, and forges the subject matter of their scholarship” (McDowell, p. 5). Land-grant institutions challenged the notion of aristocracy and set into motion the idea that the academy’s place is in the world, not beyond it, and “that is it is the business of the university to demonstrate the connection of knowledge, art, and practice” (Taylor, 1981 p. 37). The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 marked the beginning of many future acts to enable higher education to grant access and rights to more Americans..

Land-grant institutions quickly become known as “the people’s colleges” (Campbell, 1995, p.26). From their inception, land-grant institutions focused on expanding the idea of scholarship and scientific investigation to include all human endeavors (McDowell, 2001). Prior to the establishment of land-grant institutions, the academy primarily emphasized theology, history, law, and medicine. The shift in emphasis to include industry and trade was “profoundly democratic...and meant that research could provide insights into—and answers to—people’s everyday problems” (Campbell, p.26). Furthermore, the Hatch Act of 1887 and Smith Lever Act of 1914 provided not only federal funding for agriculture and engineering but services that would provide knowledge and resources for public good (Campbell). Land-grant institutions were established to fulfill America’s democratic mission and serve society (Harkavy, 2004). The idea

that academic institutions, especially land-grant institutions, should serve society was further enhanced by Dewey's philosophy of democratic education. John Dewey, one of the most influential educational philosophers of the 20th century, promoted the idea of pragmatic education (Dewey, 1916). Dewey's theory of pragmatism emphasized that students learn more when they are challenged with real-life experiences or problems, not just book or lecture learning. Dewey's primary motive for promoting pragmatic education was his belief that this best prepared students for democratic involvement during and after graduation. Dewey challenged institutions to consider innovative ways to encourage active learning inside and outside the classroom and laid the foundation for future innovative pedagogies such as action-based research and service-learning, both of which promote student civic engagement (Harkavy, 2004).

Growing Complexities of Institutions

At the turn of the 20th century, new philosophies, events, and cultural movements shaped the growing complexity of institutions. Industrialization's focus on efficiency; the growing emphasis on professionalism and specialization; and the adoption of the German university model, which stressed scholarly research, academic freedom, and specialization (Colby et al. 2003); all contributed to creating an "uneasy balance between intellectual advancement and character development on college campuses" (Yanowski, 2004, p. 8). After World War II, adult students, international students, and other non-traditional students enrolled in colleges. More and more universities turned to bureaucratic models to respond to the variations of student needs, schedules, and backgrounds, further challenging universities' abilities to shape the moral and civic development of students (Yanowski). Moreover, the nullification of *in loco parentis* in 1961 redefined universities' abilities to shape the personal and social responsibilities of students

and left many university mission statements with only “shadowy expectations regarding character development” (Yanowski, p. 9).

Contemporary history has seen a revival of civic engagement on campuses. Over the past two decades, educational reformers, national organizations, and student leaders have called upon institutions to renew their historic mission of graduating citizens (AACU, 2002; Boyer, 1987, 1994; Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993; Compass Compact, 2006; Long, 2001). Recently, 180 colleges have joined the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ (AASCU) American Democracy Project. Originally a three-year initiative focused on civic renewal in universities, the project has exceeded all expectations and has been extended (O’Conner, 2006). Campus Compact, a national organization of universities who support the promulgation of civic engagement and service-learning, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. Originally the vision of just four university presidents, Campus Compact today has over 1000 member institutions and 31 state offices and has encouraged over 20 million students to participate in civic and community related service (Campus Compact, 2006).

Campus Compact has assisted in mobilizing a national student civic engagement movement through “Raise Your Voice” (RYV), a three year campaign from 2002-2005 that involved hundreds of institutions and hundreds of thousands of students focused on understanding student civic engagement (Long & Hollander, 2006). Other organizations have given special charges to land-grant institutions. Over the past ten years two national organizations, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and AASCU, have charged member institutions to return to their roots by developing community partnerships and being responsive to local communities in deeply collaborative ways (O’Conner, 2006). In all, a great deal of energy, resources, and attention have

been given to encouraging institutions to create environments and cultures that promote student civic engagement; however, literature has spent little attention on how these environments are impacting students (Thornton & Jeager, 2006).

Studies on Institutional Culture and Civic Engagement

Literature on institutional culture and student civic engagement is limited; therefore, this study is in part exploratory. The following studies highlight the potential impact institutional culture and environments have on student learning and development, including civic related actions and outcomes as described by educators, researchers, and administrators.

In their book, *Educating Citizens: Preparing American's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, Colby et al. (2003) conducted extended case studies of 12 institutions believed to be intentionally focused on civic and moral responsibility. Through their extended time spent on these campuses, a number of shared practices and characteristics emerged: (1) a shared holistic philosophy and emphasis on moral and civic responsibility across leadership, administration, faculty, and other institutional members; (2) commitment to educating students for life in a diverse society through the core curriculum, community service, and service-learning experiences and through connecting the curricular and co-curricular; and (3) shared efforts to create a campus-wide culture that embraces certain values through rituals, stories, heroes, socialization events, symbols, or signs—creating “a vibrant sense of mission and a palpable and distinctive culture” (p. 85).

A recent ethnography focused on institutional culture and civic responsibility at the University of Virginia (UVA) found similar cultural implications (Thornton & Jeager, 2006). The importance of the student code of honor and civic duty is a vibrant part of the daily activities, rituals, legends, and stories shared between faculty, staff, and students of UVA. The

institution's ideologies on civic responsibility were found to be communicated through several campus venues including UVA admissions literature and reports, speeches, symbols, and artifacts. Staff and students shared what Pace and Stern (1958) would describe as an environmental "press" toward honor and civic-mindedness. As one graduate student on the Honor Committee recounted, "I guess [the institution's] tradition and its reputation precedes it, so I think largely [students] know the experience and they know what UVA is all about before they get here. So, they are self-selecting themselves into this civic-minded, student-led, honor-focused university, and so they are ready for that experience, I think" (Thorton & Jeager, 2006, p. 61). This study at UVA exemplifies the potential that colleges have in creating cultures that generate certain shared values, assumptions, and behaviors that can influence students; however, as noted in the UVA study, sampling involved mainly student affairs and administrator perspectives. Access to student perspectives would have strengthened the understanding of how institutional cultures impact student civic-related values and actions.

Institutional culture and college environments have also been linked to studies on student learning and development. The recent book *Student Success in College* described how this sense of a "living" mission and "lived" philosophy shared in the aforementioned studies was common among 20 institutions that were promoting effective educational environments fostering student learning and development (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Similarly, in *Involving Colleges: Successful Approaches to Fostering Student Learning and Development*, Kuh et al. (1991) highlighted the important role that campus cultural artifacts (symbols, histories, sagas, physical settings, language, and traditions), working in congruence with an institution's mission and philosophies, played in enhancing student learning and development across the 14 institutions investigated. The "Involving Colleges" study concluded that (1) institutions that have

a clear mission, kept plainly in view, encourage student involvement; (2) institutions that value and expect student initiative and responsibility encourage involvement; (3) institutions that recognize and respond to the total student experience encourage involvement; and (4) institutions that value students and take their learning seriously encourage involvement. Furthermore, “Involving Colleges” were found to have living missions and philosophies that inspired campus cultures of student involvement, both in policy and academic development, and practices that were consistent with the institution’s mission and strategic goals. The cultures of these institutions, in addition, established a strong ethic of care and relationship between students and institutional members inside and outside the classroom, which was linked to encouragement of greater student learning and development. Extensive case studies across several institutions in the aforementioned reviews show the potential in how institutional culture and environments can both implicitly and explicitly impact student learning and development, including the moral and civic enhancement of students.

It is unclear to what extent the student lens (perceptions, experiences, impressions and reactions) has been accessed in these studies, as was the case in the UVA ethnography study. Students are considered an important part of institutional culture and should be included in studies focused on how college culture and environments impact behavior (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Vogelsang & Astin, 2005). Moreover, the majority of these studies have included smaller institutions, with few larger universities examined. Furthermore, few studies have focused on large, research-extensive universities with land-grant responsibilities. Research universities are considered to be critical in promoting student civic development in the United States because of their significant institutional resources and ability to graduate more students (Checkoway, 2001).

College Environments and Civic Engagement

College programs, workshops, courses, and events are important expressions of institutional cultures and environments (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The following provides a brief overview of recent studies that highlight the potential college environments have to influence and shape civic engagement related outcomes.

Perhaps no pedagogical method and course design has been more examined as it relates to civic engagement than service-learning. Proponents claim that service-learning pedagogy offers a unique way to teach academic disciplines while addressing real world problems in local, national, or global communities (Eyler, 2000; Myers-Lipton, 1996; Vogelsang & Astin, 2000). Students of service-learning courses have reported increases in interpersonal skills, social responsibility, and sense of engagement (Eyler, 2000; Vogelsang, & Astin, 2000). In a national study, Astin and Sax (1998) found that participating in service-related activities during the undergraduate years positively enhanced academic development, life skills, and civic development. Globally, service-learning has been shown to increase international understanding (Myers-Lipton, 1996), a prevalent and significant outcome included in many university mission statements. A more recent study revealed the positive influence service-learning has on diversity and political awareness, community self-efficacy, and civic engagement related scores over the course of a semester (Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Community service and volunteer programs on many college campuses have long been an integral part of co-curricular programming and outreach to local communities. Many studies have been conducted on the benefits of community service and civic related values and behaviors (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). More recently, alternative spring break programs (ASB) have become popular on college campuses. These week-long trips focusing on social issues both

locally and nationally have been shown to increase students' capacity for understanding community issues and create a clearer sense of social responsibility (Rhoades & Neururer, 1998). Mostly organized and led by student advocates and leaders, ASB programs have become an important extension of the college service environment.

College leadership development programs and courses are widely popular and important curricular and co-curricular experiences on many campuses nationwide. A longitudinal study at ten institutions given grants to implement leadership development programs examined developmental outcomes between participants and non-participants. Five outcomes emerged from an extended factor analysis that showed statistically significant differences between the participant and non-participant groups in the following areas: leadership understanding and commitment, personal and societal values, community orientation, multicultural awareness, and civic responsibility (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Several of these factors are civically related; however, civic responsibility had the largest variance explained by leadership programs after controlling for pre-college variables (Cress et al., 2001). Furthermore, qualitative themes such as strong connection with the mission of the institution and leadership programs; a philosophical focus on ethically and socially responsible behavior; and common practices of service-learning, community service and volunteer experiences shared among faculty, staff, and students emerged from further investigations.

As our society and college student population continues to become increasingly diverse, the number of training programs to prepare graduates to become engaged citizens of a diverse society and democracy has increased (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Studies examining the impact of initiatives including inter-group forums and dialogues, racial awareness workshops, and diversity courses on student outcomes suggest that these programs

positively impact student civic and racial engagement (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, a recent longitudinal study of ten institutions found that student participation in co-curricular diversity initiatives and community service events had a positive impact on social action engagement, including promoting an end to poverty, racial tolerance and respect, and social justice related values) (Hurtardo, Engberg, & Ponjuan, 2003).

Student Development Theories and Civic Engagement

Literature on civic engagement is often associated with values and behaviors aligned with theories related to student development and learning (Colby et al., 2003). Student development theories, rooted in human development disciplines, and developmental and social psychology are focused on how traditional-aged students (students 18-24 years old) develop and learn during college (McEwen, 2003). Student development theories examine the holistic processes of becoming a more complex individual, specifically the behavioral, affective, and cognitive changes a student experiences while in the college (Sanford, 1966). In this section of the literature review, a select group of student development theories are explored in order to understand more broadly the possible relationship between student civic engagement and institutional cultures and environments.

It is important to note that student development theories are primarily descriptive, focusing on describing development processes, rather than prescriptive or explanatory (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978). Building on Erickson's psychosocial stages, many student development theories focus on the stage identity versus identity confusion that occurs in late adolescence (Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998). Over the past several decades, student development has become more complex as the college student population has increased and

diversified. There are three branches of student development theory germane to this study: (1) psychosocial theories, (2) cognitive-structural theories, and (3) person-environment theories.

Chickering & Reisser's Psychosocial Theory of Student Development

Psychosocial theories examine students' personal and interpersonal lives, specifically examining how students change in their feelings, values, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The individual and his or her environment are believed to be important components to examine in the development of students (McEwen, 2003). Perhaps the most widely cited and used theory in student affairs practice and research, Chickering and Reisser's Psychosocial Theory of Student Development (1993) focuses on the identity development of college students. This theory features seven vectors of development that contribute to identity formation. Building upon Chickering's earlier research, Chickering and Reisser wrote that establishing an identity involves learning and development and progresses through cycles of challenge and response, differentiation and integration, and disequilibrium and regained equilibrium (Chickering and Reisser). It should be noted that although the vectors are not rigidly sequential, they do build upon each other as a student progresses toward individuation. The following section outlines the seven vectors.

Developing Competence: In the first vector, mostly first and second year traditional-aged college students experience opportunities to explore their skills intellectually, physically, manually, and interpersonally. As students gain a sense of competence that comes from positive experiences and successful application of new skill sets, they increase in their confidence that they can cope with life issues and successfully achieve personal goals.

Managing Emotions: As students develop their competencies and self-confidence, they begin to recognize, accept, and learn to appropriately express and control emotions. This can cover a broad range of emotions, including aggression, sexual desire, shame, guilt, caring, optimism, and inspiration.

Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence: As students increase their ability to appropriately and responsibly manage their emotions, students move away from their needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others and toward instrumental independence (self-direction and advanced ability to solve problems). Students in this vector also begin the process of redefining their relationships with an understanding of their interconnectedness with others.

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships: Building upon a growing realization of their interconnectedness with others, students within this vector develop a stronger appreciation of differences, interpersonal tolerance, and capacity for healthy and lasting intimate relationships.

Establishing Identity: Building on previous vectors, students become more comfortable and confident with their body, appearance, gender, and sexual orientation. Students in this vector are developing a clear self-concept. This solid sense of self, role, and lifestyle provides a framework for the development of personal purpose and integrity.

Developing Purpose: As students establish their identity, they have a greater ability to make meaningful commitments, develop vocational goals, and follow-through on their decisions.

Developing Integrity: In this vector, students are developing congruence between their values, beliefs, and actions. Students are better able to balance self-interest with a sense of social responsibility.

Student affairs educators have long utilized Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Psychosocial Theory of Student Development to enhance campus environments through learning

communities, residence hall programs, first-year initiatives, leadership development, and other curricular and co-curricular activities that promote identity development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It is evident that the promotion of identity development in college can lead to opportunities for students to better understand who they are, what is important, and how to connect what they value in socially responsible ways. Chickering and Reisser's theory also provides a framework for understanding how college environments impact identity development. Their research has shown that the quality of student-faculty relationships, institutional objectives, curriculum (especially curriculum promoting diversity), teaching, institutional size, student programs and services, and the quality of peer and student community interaction all contribute to the identity development of college students (Chickering & Reisser). Studies on the impact of activities and programs such as service-learning, which has been shown to promote student civic engagement, point towards an increase in social responsibility, appreciation of differences, and increase in self-confidence—all behaviors that contribute to the identity development of students (Astin, Sax, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory

Rooted in the work of Piaget, cognitive-structural theories examine how students think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences. Within these theories the mind is thought to have structures that can change, expand, and become more complex as one develops (Knefelkamp et al., 1978). Often events that create cognitive dissonance encourage cognitive growth (Kohlberg, 1981). Cognitive-structural theories include moral, intellectual, and faith development. From their study of institutions that promote student moral and civic education, Colby et al. (2003) establish a sound argument that one cannot separate the dimensions of moral judgment, interpretation, and reasoning from civic development. They contend that “the ability to think

clearly about difficult moral issues is important not only in the domain of personal morality but also as civic and political affairs, because the latter domain so often entails such issues as balancing the rights and welfare of individuals and groups” (p. 101).

Kohlberg’s (1981) theory of moral development explores how students cognitively process moral dilemmas, focusing on the rationale for decisions rather than the choices themselves. Growth in moral development occurs when a student becomes more complex in his or her rationale in response to moral dilemmas. Kohlberg’s theory is grounded in the concept of justice (morality of rights and rules) and was constructed through extensive interviews utilizing hypothetical moral dilemmas. One of the major contributions of Kohlberg’s theory is the concept of the “plus-one effect:” when a student is exposed to reasoning patterns one stage above the stage where his or her current reasoning patterns lie,,moral development and growth is likely to occur (Evans et al., 1998). Kohlberg’s model of “Just Communities” in schools provided forums where students could be involved in discussions around moral and ethical dilemmas. This concept has been utilized in colleges through dialogues on poverty, diversity, politics, and other community issues to enhance students’ moral and ethical development and appreciation of differences (Light, 2001).

Kohlberg’s (1981) theory has three primary levels of moral development, moving from simplistic moral reasoning to much more sophisticated and complex reasoning; transition stages are described between levels. In the pre-conventional level, an individual’s thinking is concrete and self-focused. Societal rules are not yet understood; rather, action is based upon personal needs or avoidance of punishment and physical consequences. In the conventional level, rules of society and opinions of others take precedence in decision making. Most traditional-aged students entering college are at stages three or four within this level (Colby et al., 2003). At stage

three, individuals usually base moral decisions upon a perceived right behavior, often seeking the approval of others. In other words, good behavior is defined as what pleases those to whom one is close and gains approval. At stage four, actions are based upon upholding the system and obeying the rules of society. Showing respect for authority and maintaining social order for its own sake is seen as important.

The post-conventional level is the final and most complex level of moral development according to Kohlberg (1981). At this level, reasoning is based upon self-determined principles and values, including justice, equality, and respect for human dignity. Laws are acceptable as long as they promote basic human rights and values, and there is an understanding that different societies have different views of what is right or wrong. At the most advanced stage, attained by very few people, principles take precedence over laws. A belief in universal moral truth can be applied to all situations.

Feminist theorists have further shaped Kohlberg's theory (1981) by examining how morality and identity are developed in conjunction with other people based upon an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982). Noddings (1984) noted that women are more likely than men to consider connections with others in determining how to respond to moral dilemmas. Research has shown that colleges do impact the moral development of students. Studies suggest that social networks, academic coursework, and structured programs can have a significant impact on the moral development of students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

One of the strengths in Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1981) is its influence and support of other cognitive theories such as Perry's Theory of Intellectual Development (1971) and Baxter-Magolda's Theory of Epistemological Reflection (1992). The progression from dualistic absolutism to multiple, relative viewpoints and understanding is a clear theme in

cognitive theories: the more students are exposed to opinions, experiences, and viewpoints that challenge their own understanding, the more likely they are to grow in their cognitive abilities. Service-learning and other pedagogies that promote civic related outcomes create environments where cognitive capacities can be enhanced through active learning experiences that require students respond to real world problems (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Perry (1971) and Baxter-Magolda's (1992) research points to the importance of creating learning environments inside and outside the classroom that move students beyond absolutism toward independent and contextual knowing.

Person-Environment Theories of Student Development

In *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991; 2005) review over three decades of research on college students and illustrate through meta-analysis how college positively impacts students' learning and development, values and attitudes, moral reasoning, and psychosocial development. The belief that student development occurs as an interactive and dynamic process between persons and their environment (Strange, 1999) is rooted in Lewin's (1936) person-environment theory. Lewin's belief that the interaction between individuals and environments influences behaviors or outcomes is supported by several related theories in student development. Anchoring this study is the investigation of the degree to which students attribute their civic engagement to the culture of their institution. Institutional culture includes the many environments that exist within an institution. The following student development theories are of particular interest to this study: Astin's Involvement Theory (1984) and Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality (1989).

Astin's Involvement Theory (1984) refers to involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience (i.e. studying,

participating in student organizations, etc.). Student involvement can be expressed through many different forms. Astin discovered in his subsequent research with college students that that greater the student's involvement in college, the greater the amount of learning and personal development he or she will experience (Astin, 1993b). Astin also found that peer influence is one of the most powerful forms of involvement on a college campus. Peers serve as the most important factor affecting the educational and personal development of students, particularly when peer groups place high value on altruism and social activism (Astin, 1993b). Lastly, it is important to note from Astin's theory and studies that the extent of student involvement is connected to how easily students identify with their college environment.

This concept is further expanded by the Theory of Mattering and Marginality (Schlossberg, 1989). In her theory and research, Schlossberg believed that the greater connection and feeling of importance students perceived from their college environment, the more students focused on their learning and development. Conversely, the more students felt marginalized or not affirmed, the more time they spent trying to fit in. Strange and Banning (2001) built on this concept by creating a model of a learning community that illustrated the importance of creating environments that are safe and inclusive, which leads to student involvement and ultimately to becoming full members of the institutional learning community.

Student development theories explore values and behaviors often associated with civic engagement, which is important because there is no central theory for student civic engagement (Colby, et al., 2003). Additionally, the student development theories highlighted in this section have helped educators understand how to create environments and cultures that enhance the learning development and of traditional-aged college students (McEwen, 2003). Moreover, these theories may prove helpful in understanding how traditional-aged college students in this study

connect the development of their civic engagement to their institutional experiences during a developmentally significant time in their lives.

Challenges Facing Campuses Today

Institutions face many challenges when considering how to embrace their civic mission. The messages of individualism and materialism are evident on campuses today as the commercialization of higher education, including corporate sponsorships of athletic programs, faculty and student research, and branding on Web sites and other forms of advertisement have become more common (Bok, 2003). Though corporate sponsorships are financially beneficial to institutions, they do reinforce materialistic themes (Colby et al., 2003). Moreover, the presence of media influences is more prevalent than ever today. The age of information technology has seamlessly connected colleges to media outlets, which play both a beneficial and destructive role in the development of student values and worldviews through television, internet, film, and music (Kellner, 1995). Few would deny the messages of materialism, commercialism, self-interest, and other influences prevalent in media culture that conflict with civic values (Colby et al.). Similarly, the push for customer service by utilizing business and corporate principles within higher education has created a “McDonaldization” of the university wherein education is seen as an object of consumption in “much the same way they [parent and students] are consumers of what the mall and Disney World have to offer” (Ritzer, 2002, p. 19). Perhaps Harkavy (2004) best captures the message of commercialization within institutional culture as it conflicts with the civic values of education: “When universities openly and increasingly pursue commercialization, the pursuit of economic self-interest by students tends to be legitimized and reinforced and contributes to the widespread sense among them [students] that they are in college solely to gain career skills and credentials (p. 11).

Institutions are also challenged by their own cultures, particularly the differing values and practices of administrators, faculty, staff, and student cultures and subcultures. (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The interaction among these multiple layers of institutional culture makes for rich, diverse experiences for students; however, the interaction can also create cultures where mixed or conflicting messages occur (Strange & Banning, 2001). As Yanowski (2004) noted, many faculty and administrators in higher education have drifted over time “toward a frame of reference in which intellectualism, secularism, professionalism, and individualism are deemed central,” sending out conflicting messages about the role that institutional members play in influencing or shaping the moral and civic development of students (p. 10). For instance, “if college students see faculty rewarded for pursuing their own professional prestige rather than for caring for others or the institution, if they are subjected to competitive, zero-sum climates in which one student’s success contributes to another’s failure, if they are confronted with institutional hypocrisy, those practices convey moral messages that can contribute to students’ cynicism and self-interestedness” (Colby et al., p. 11). Moreover, the messages of disciplinary ethnocentrism and traditional pedagogies can work strongly against the civic mission of institutions, communicating that the pursuit of prestige and self-interest is more important than community and civic related values (Harkavy, 2004).

Student perspectives on the nature of institutions and student civic engagement further reflect the challenges facing institutions. At the Wingspread Summit on Student Civic Engagement in 2001, student leaders from 27 colleges and universities gathered to talk about the state of student civic engagement around the country. Some of the noteworthy themes from the summit that relate to mixed messages included mandatory community service hours (send a message that service is a form of punishment); physical barriers between the university and

community (send a message of disconnect); lack of university orientation to the local neighborhoods; and little support for staffing, resources, and funding for community or service-learning centers on campus (reflect the lack of importance) (Long, 2001). According to the student leaders, these perceptions both implicitly and explicitly communicate conflicting messages about the true value and worth that institutions place on civic engagement. Students also noted that being treated like consumers of knowledge, the emphasis on grades over experiences, and universities' failures to frequently recognize community service all discouraged student civic engagement (Long, 2001).

Summit participants also called for institutions to seek student input and agency in shaping civic engagement on campus. Many students did not feel that their voices were heard on their respective campuses. This summit group concluded that students today may have different viewpoints and interpretations of civic engagement from educators in higher education (Long, 2001). It is in the spirit and charge of this student summit and subsequent national campaign (Raise Your Voice, 2002-2005) that this study seeks to explore how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement through the perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of its students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted how institutional cultures and the many environments within college campuses today impact student learning and development, behaviors, attitudes, and values (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The national push for institutions to revive their civic missions is evident; however, to what extent institutional cultures are impacting the development of student civic engagement as understood by students is not as clear. Studies on institutional culture and environments related to civic outcomes are promising, but most of them are designed

and interpreted by educators with little input from students. Students are an important part of institutional culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). If institutions are serious about fostering a culture of student civic engagement and graduating engaged citizens, they need to examine how civically engaged students are impacted both positively and negatively by their college experiences (Vogelsang & Astin, 2005).

CHAPTER 3

FRAMING THE STUDY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST INQUIRY

Introduction

The intent of this qualitative study was to understand how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement through the perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of students. Utilizing a constructivist design, this combination interview and document (photo) analysis study examined a group of students who are civically engaged at a large, public research-extensive institution. This study was largely exploratory and guided by the following research questions:

1. How does institutional culture impact student civic engagement?
2. What mixed messages, if any, do students perceive about civic engagement from their institution?
3. How do students describe an institutional culture that truly enhances student civic engagement?

This chapter reviews the overall design and rationale, sample selection, and methods for data collection and analysis. Concluding this chapter is an overview of the validity and reliability of the design, including researcher biases and assumptions. Before detailing the design of this study, it is important to understand the major paradigm and research philosophies guiding this study.

The Constructivist Paradigm

Paradigms are important to understand in research. A paradigm is a way of looking at the world; it is composed of certain philosophical assumptions and traditions that guide thinking and action in a research process (Creswell, 2003; Mertens, 2005). There are two major paradigms that have been of

particular importance in the social science world: post positivism and constructivism. In the post positivist tradition, knowledge that develops from research is based upon empirical observation and measurement; thus, numeric measures of observations and theory verification is paramount. Data, evidence, and rational (objective) considerations shape and develop knowledge. Post positivism, however, challenges the traditional positivistic notion of absolute knowledge. It recognizes that one can not be absolutely positive about claims when studying human behavior and actions (Mertens, 2005). Quantitative methods are the dominant form of research in the post positivist tradition.

The constructivist paradigm emerged in response to the post positivist tradition and has increased in use and understanding among social science researchers in the past three decades (Creswell, 2003). A constructivist operates under the assumption that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and evolve through lived experiences of the research participants (Creswell). A constructivist often examines and explores in-depth processes and experiences in social sciences that can not be captured numerically or through objective processes. Researchers employing the constructivist paradigm are focused on the discovery of meaning or meaning making and “can entail the ways of being of individuals within an organization or characteristics and behavior of groups who occupy a particular culture” (Stage & Manning, 2003, p. 21). Qualitative methods are the dominant form of research employed in the constructivist tradition. It is important as a researcher to know and understand how paradigms drive the curiosities and interests of a researcher, the research questions, and data collection and analysis processes.

To further unpack the assumptions within the constructivist paradigm, Creswell (2003) highlighted how constructivism responds to five major philosophical questions in research: (1) What is ontology, or the nature of reality? (2) What is epistemology, or the nature of knowledge and relationship between researcher and participants? (3) What is the axiology, or the role of values in research? (4)

What is the methodology, or the process of obtaining knowledge? (5) What is the rhetoric, or the language of research?

In response to the question of ontology, a constructivist believes the nature of reality is varied and socially constructed. Due to this belief, inquiry often raises more questions than answers. Furthermore, given the multitude of realities and the perspectives that emerge from those realities, prediction is not likely (Manning & Stage, 2003) and research designs have to be flexible and responsive (Merriam, 1998).

In considering the question of epistemology, the nature of knowledge in the constructivist paradigm is a dynamic, interactive process between researchers and participants. A constructivist understands that the researcher and participants affect and influence one another during the research process; in fact, it is specifically this kind of human interaction that produces in-depth data and quality findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In response to the question of axiology, constructivism embraces the biases, assumptions, and values a researcher brings to the study, as opposed to the value-free, unbiased perspective of post positivist research. These biases, assumptions, and values are an important part of understanding, a major purpose of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998).

In response to the question of methodology, constructivism utilizes an inductive process to generate knowledge. Rather than testing a hypothesis or existing theory, a constructivist examines what emerges from the grounded data to see what new theories can help make meaning of the phenomenon under study. The researcher is the instrument that collects, interprets, and generates the theory that emerges from the data; therefore, the rigor applied to qualitative research is essential in order to capture the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam, 1998; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001).

Lastly, in response to the question of rhetoric, the language of research within the constructivist tradition is very personal. Because of the researcher's involvement in the research process, the researcher and participants' voices are an important component of the rhetoric throughout the report.

Design

A constructivist design was utilized in this study. This design, also known as an interpretive design, is a common form of qualitative research utilizing interviews, observations, and/or document analysis to collect data (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research was best suited for this study because it seeks descriptively rich data from a small, purposeful sample with meaning and understanding as its end goals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this case, I explored the phenomenon of institutional culture as it related to the enhancement of student civic engagement. This study utilized a series of interviews (individual and a photo-elicitation focus group) to explore the relationship between the culture and environments of one institution and student civic engagement as understood through student perceptions, perspectives, and experiences. Employing a constructivist design is appropriate when investigating perceptions, processes, and experiences that can not be measured quantitatively (Creswell, 2003; Stage & Manning, 2003). This study was exploratory in nature because no studies have focused specifically on how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement from the student perspective.

The Interpretive Perspective

Guiding the qualitative methods in this constructivist study was an interpretive perspective, which assumes that humans construct meaning from complex interactions with their social surroundings, culture, environment, and other related factors (Crotty, 1998). The goal of interpretivism is to "understand the complex world of a lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). This type of understanding from the participant's perspective is also called the "emic" or insider's point of view (Schwandt). Symbolic interactionism, a school of thought that

describes human behavior, expands this thought further: “What humans say and do are the result of how they interpret their social world” (Berg, 2007, p. 10). In explaining the idea of symbolic interactionism, Mead (1934) argued that all learning, including an increased sense of self, is socially and relationally based; that is, learning takes place in context of social settings where individuals must act and react to norms, attitudes, behaviors, and values of others. The diverse environments and cultures at play in a single institution certainly lends itself to a perspective that examines the social interactions between students and institutional culture in order to better understand how colleges impact the development of student civic engagement.

Sample Selection Process

In qualitative studies, purposeful samples are utilized to access information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). Information-rich cases are “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 52). Trustworthy qualitative research requires access to information-rich samples. Information-rich data is essential to discover meaning and uncover phenomena (Merriam, 1998).

Before recruiting students for this study, I developed a purposeful criterion to enhance this study’s ability to access information-rich data. There were three main criteria that I utilized to recruit a student sample that provided the rich data needed to answer my research questions: First, students needed to have at least two years of experience at the institution. Since this study sought to understand if institutional culture and its diverse environments impacted student civic engagement, it made sense to recruit students who had enough time, experience, and opportunities to interact with their institution in order to offer in-depth reflections and experiences related to their civic engagement. All participants in this study had at least two years of experience, with the majority being third or fourth years students. Second, the focus of this study was on traditional-aged (18-24) students. Though the college student

population today is inclusive of many non-traditional students, the potential for understanding student development (such as civic development or engagement) is most likely within the traditional-aged group during college, according to extensive student development research, (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In addition, many of the student development theories and studies on college impact focused on students who were between 18 and 24 years old (Evans, et al., 1998; McEwen, 2003), making the age range a logical choice for this study.

The third and most important criterion for this study was to recruit a sample of students who were civically engaged. Getting a handle on what civic engagement means varies from institution to institution. Universities and higher education literature often link civic engagement to values and behaviors related to civic responsibility, civic involvement, activism, citizenship, political engagement, social justice, social responsibility, service-learning, and community service, reflecting the inclusive nature and breadth of civic engagement in higher education (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2002). Thornton and Jeager (2006) highlighted common dimensions used to describe civic responsibility throughout higher education literature, including support of democratic values, systems, and processes; desire to act beneficially in community; use of knowledge and skills for societal benefit; appreciation for and interest in those unlike self; and personal accountability. These descriptors and definitions are important to note as they assisted me in recruiting a student group that expressed different forms of civic engagement on and off campus.

Building the Participant Group

In order to build a base of potential candidates for this study, I initially collected information through local and university newspapers and other institutional information reports on students who were civically engaged (e.g. “Amazing Students” on university Web site). I also sought recommendations from colleagues and students who had personal, working relationships with students

who were civically engaged. I met with colleagues or emailed them information about the study to help inform their recommendations (see Appendix A). This type of recruitment is called network sampling and is commonly utilized in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Along with their recommendations, colleagues were asked to send me a detailed list of their student's civic involvement. Altogether this generated a list of 40 potential candidates for my study. It should be noted as well that I was fortunate to have established connections with administrators who oversaw a variety of curricular and co-curricular civic engagement programs, which offered me access to different environments on campus.

To help organize this candidate list into a purposeful and manageable group for an extensive qualitative study, I broke the list down into a variety of civic-related involvement behaviors on and off campus, including political involvement, social justice and activism, community or philanthropic service, and student leadership (e.g. judiciary board, student government, or student ambassadors). I also organized the group by gender, year in school, and ethnicity. I utilized a form of stratified sampling to finalize my participation group. Stratified sampling strengthens a qualitative study by maximizing the potential to reflect the diverse opinions and experiences representative of the population. (Patton, 2002). In this case, I sought to include many representations of civic engagement at one institution through examining students of different genders, ethnicities, and types of civic involvement. The combination of a purposeful and stratified sample strengthened this study, gave me access to "rich, purposeful data," and unpacked the diverse student perspectives on institutional culture as related to student civic engagement (Patton, 2002, p. 52). Twelve students who I believed fit the criteria for my study were initially invited to participate. For more information on participant demographics, see Table 1 and Table 2 on pages 207-208.

Sample Size

While there are no specific rules for sample size in qualitative research, I took into consideration the purpose of the inquiry (to explore the relationship between institutional culture and student civic engagement), what I desired to know given my available time and resources as a researcher, and the point at which data reached saturation (Patton, 2002). The twelve participants in my study created a generous amount of data from two extensive sets of interviews (individual and photo-elicitation interviews) that reached thematic saturation across the data. Redundancy or saturation of data is an important principle of data validation in the coding process of qualitative research and in determining whether or not to increase the sample size (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Since saturation was reached with the initial twelve participants, it was determined that the sample size was adequate.

Statement about Different Definitions of Civic Engagement

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between institutional culture and student civic engagement. A recent national student campaign revealed that students may have different interpretations of civic engagement from the traditional descriptions in higher education (Campus Compact, 2006; Long & Hollander, 2006). This difference emphasizes an even greater need for educators to understand what students, think, believe, and value about civic engagement in order to create environments and cultures that positively influence and develop students' civic engagement. Understanding how students define civic engagement strengthened the depth and trustworthiness of the data as it related to the purpose of this study.

Description and Rationale for Site of Study

Established in the late 18th century as a land-grant institution and serving as the state's flagship institution, South East University (SEU) was a germane location for an embedded exploration of institutional culture and student civic engagement. Land-grant institutions were created to be the

“people’s university” to offer greater access for education and to equip students for citizenship (Campell, 1995, p. 26). Land-grant institutions have been commissioned and charged to lead the efforts on civic renewal in this country (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 2001). Large, public, research-extensive institutions such as SEU have the ability to graduate informed and engaged citizens who in turn can positively impact the local, national, and global communities of future generations (Checkoway, 2001). The few studies on institutions and civic engagement, however, have predominately focused on private liberal arts or religious institutions (Colby et al., 2003), which made SEU a relevant site for the study.

Today, SEU has a current undergraduate student population of 24,000 and an additional 10,000 graduate students. In 2005, SEU created the Office of Service-Learning to enhance innovative methods of teaching and instruction and to increase student and faculty participation in civic related activities. SEU has a host of community and service programs, including a grassroots partnership between SEU and the city to improve the social and economic conditions of the local and surrounding communities. In addition, the Institute of Higher Education at SEU is host to one of only a few journals in the nation that is focused on higher education and outreach (O’Conner, 2006).

Introduction to Data Collection and Analysis

The primary method for data collection in this study was through a series of both individual interviews and photo-elicitation interviews conducted in focus group format. There are several types of interview approaches in qualitative research, ranging from structured and scripted interviews to open-ended interviews that have few questions prepared in advance (Lincoln, 1985). A semi-structured interview was utilized for both individual interviews and focus groups because it afforded me the flexibility to develop, adapt, and generate further questions as data emerged (Berg, 2007; Rudin & Rudin, 2005). Given the complex nature of describing how students construct meaning and reflect on

their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of institutional culture and civic engagement, these techniques were most appropriate. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for the purpose of capturing all of the participants' comments and noting emerging themes and questions for follow-up interviews. The twelve individual interviews and four focus groups conducted in this study lasted an average of 90 minutes and generated hundreds of pages of data. Student consent to participate in this study required a willingness to participate in a focus group interview to process the photo-elicitation experience. Participants were asked to take pictures of campus symbols, processes, experiences, etc. that reflected messages they perceived about civic engagement. After completion of the individual interview, participants were given a photo-elicitation prompt sheet to guide their exploration of the different messages they perceived about civic engagement on campus (see Appendix C). Photo elicitation is an emerging technique utilized in qualitative research, especially in studies exploring environments and cultures (Strange & Banning, 2001). The following sections expand on the interview and photo-elicitation methods utilized in this study.

The Interview Tradition

Interviewing is key to collecting data in many forms of qualitative research in the social sciences (e.g. education, sociology, anthropology) and utilized often in case studies, ethnographies, oral histories, and cultural studies (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). Because qualitative methodology is based upon “the detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors, the use of direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts” (Whitt, 1991, p. 406), interviews are often employed. It is important that the qualitative researcher give equal attention to the content of the interview as well as how it will be implemented.

My interview guide was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews reflect an awareness that participants understand the world (in this case, the institution) in varying ways (Berg, 2007). In order to

explore processes and responses that a researcher may or may not anticipate, I felt that a semi-structured interview process for this study was necessary, especially considering the subjectivity of culture and student perceptions. I designed a number of predetermined questions for the individual interview and asked them in a systematic order, but I allowed myself the freedom to probe and adapt to responses, a strength of the semi-structured interview (Berg, 2007). Question construction, no matter the type of interview structure, should be given serious consideration. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) noted that interview questions should be carefully structured for wording, intent, and sequencing. Good interview questions are clear and concise and not layered in such a way that confuses respondents or requires clarification. I arranged the order of my interview questions to flow from easy to more personal or difficult in order to build trust and rapport with my participants. I intentionally used language that was familiar and easily understood by students. Pilot interviews with students and colleagues afforded me the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of question content and language, which I believe improved the quality and reliability of the interview process (Berg, 2007).

Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest an interview process that resonated with my natural instincts and skills as an interviewer. Rubin and Rubin posit that there are three types of responsive interview questions: main questions that give shape and being to the purpose of the study, probing questions that are utilized to access more in-depth responses, and follow-up questions for clarification and review of main questions.

Rubin and Rubin's semi-structured interview design was appropriate for this study as it allowed for the needed structure to investigate the multiple dimensions of institutional culture and the flexibility to probe and follow up on the diverse interpretations from the students. Probing and follow-up questions, both prepared and impromptu, were utilized to probe deeper into the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions shared by my participants. In order to examine the layers of institutional

culture that impacted student civic engagement, I also utilized Strange and Banning's (2001) comprehensive framework—the physical, human aggregate, organizational, and constructed environments of an institution—as probes to further examine student responses (see Appendix B). For example, questions exploring the human aggregate environment of an institution's culture addressed how relationships with peers, student communities, and faculty or staff influenced or shaped student civic engagement. For more details on this framework, see chapter 2.

The type of relationship, trust, and rapport I created with my participants was an important component of collecting rich, descriptive data from interviews, especially in a study that conducted two sets of interview processes over the course of a month (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Berg (2007) provided a framework for guiding individual and focus group interviews that assisted me in building rapport, trust, and a level of comfort needed to capture honest, in-depth responses warranted in qualitative inquiries.

The following is generated from a review of interview literature:

1. *Never begin an interview cold.* Show interest in the respondent's life. Ask questions that establish an ease in a tone that is warm and comfortable.
2. *Remember your purpose.* Communicate up front the purpose and expected etiquette during the interview, including the role you will play to keep the interview on target.
3. *Present a natural front.* Be relaxed, affirmative, and as natural as you can.
4. *Demonstrate aware hearing.* Be sure to offer your respondents appropriate nonverbal responses. (i.e..if they describe something funny, smile.) Do not present yourself as disinterested or unaware.
5. *Think about appearance.* Dress appropriately for both the setting and the kind of individual(s) you are working with.

6. *Interview in a comfortable place.* Be sure the setting is comfortable yet private. If the respondent is fearful of being overheard or being seen, the interview is not going to elicit authentic responses.
7. *Do not be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.* Be aware when respondents begin giving yes-and-no answers. These responses do not offer much during analysis. Be ready to probe with questions such as, “Can you tell me more about that?” Of course, the quality of questions asked is an important part of getting in-depth answers.
8. *Be respectful.* Be sure that respondents feel that he or she is an integral part of your research and that all responses shared are greatly appreciated. (Berg, 2007, p. 130-131).

The focus group interview structure was much more open-ended than the individual interviews. Participants were asked to share what pictures they took, why they took them, and what they meant as civic engagement messages. The only structure I provided was centered on moderating group responses and reactions to the pictures. I did this by asking participants to refrain from interjecting until the respondent had ample time to process through all pictures. As the moderator, I gave myself the right to clarify and to assist respondents with moving along if time was becoming an issue. This structure allowed students to share their pictures without interruption, which I believe enhanced my participants’ ability to interweave the pictures into a story about the different messages they perceived about civic engagement. I chose to conduct the second interviews in focus group format to promote student synergy. One of the strengths of focus group interviews is to allow for group members to connect, challenge, and reinforce one another’s perspectives on a shared topic of interest (Berg, 2007), which was the case in this study.

Photo-Elicitation Interviews (PEI)

The second set of interviews processed photographs taken by students about messages they perceived about civic engagement from their institution. This allowed participants to expand upon their responses to the second research question: What messages, if any, do students perceive from their institution about civic engagement? Photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) introduce photographs into a research interview by “bringing images into the center of the research agenda” (Loeffler, 2004, p. 538). PEI is an emerging technique developed originally in the anthropology and sociology disciplines that is used in many social science fields today (Harper, 2002). In his review of PEI, Harper found photographs were used as visual representations of people, objects, symbols, or artifacts; depictions of events; and as methods of connecting individuals to social groups, society, culture or history.

There are two primary ways to utilize PEI. In one technique, the researcher takes pictures of the study’s setting and invites participants to discuss and respond to the photographs. In the other technique, the researcher invites the participants to take their own photos as they see their world and make meaning of it. This photo-elicitation technique, known as auto-driven, is a more inductive research approach as participants are invited to collect data themselves, thereby accessing participants’ expertise and direct experiences (Clark, 1999). This second technique was most appropriate for the purposes of this study. Students were asked to collect data at their institution through photographs, which offered a rich opportunity to collect several different viewpoints and perspectives about institutional culture as it relates to student civic engagement.

PEI is highly reflexive and collaborative as researchers become listeners and participants take the lead in discussing what the pictures mean and why they are significant (Branch, 2003). Researchers who have used PEI believe that it is effective because “images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than

do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words” (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Collier and Collier (1986) posited that photographs “sharpen the memory and give the interview an immediate character of realistic reconstruction” and can serve as a medium between researchers and participants to probe deeper than words alone (p. 106). This study is about the culture and many environments of an institution; therefore, pictures served as a powerful medium between the researcher and participants’ in-depth viewpoints of how the culture of their institution has impacted their civic engagement.

Preparing Students for the Photo-Elicitation Assignment

At the conclusion of each individual interview, I reviewed the photo prompt assignment (see Appendix C) with my participants. This document acted as a guide to assist students in taking pictures of different messages they perceived about civic engagement from their institution. Students were not given specific direction on how many pictures of positive, negative, or mixed messages should be taken, simply to take 10-15 pictures of messages they perceived. I deliberately did not put specific parameters around what type of messages to see what students naturally selected. Students were given disposable cameras at the end of the first interview along with the photo prompt sheet and instructions on preparing for the second interview. The period between the first and second interview was approximately two weeks and served as a time for students to reflect on the first interview as they considered what items to photograph. The second interview was an extension of the first interview as students further explored through photographs the institutional culture and messages discussed during the first interview, though this time through a group format instead of an individual interview. In all, 125 pictures were taken of different messages perceived about civic engagement, providing a rich array of different constructions, interpretations, and reflections during the four focus groups.

In order to provide a point of reference during focus groups in case photographs did not develop correctly, participants were provided a photo journal to briefly describe the photograph taken and why

they took it. Some participants wrote beyond the requested information and provided further rich information for analysis. The idea of the photo journal emerged from a study conducted by Oliver and Oliver (2000) that incorporated the use of narrative notebooks during their photo-elicitation study of first-year student experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is not like quantitative processes in which a theory or hypothesis is presented first and then tested by data analysis. Through an inductive process, qualitative research first analyzes the data to see what emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of analyzing data is a rigorous process that commences as soon as the research begins (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative analysis is begun after all the data has been collected (Warren & Karner, 2005). This study employed the constant comparative method, which emphasizes the interplay of collection and analysis in order to code emerging themes and concepts across participant interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Merriam (1998) suggested that when one employs the constant comparative method that the basic strategy “is to do just what the name implies—constantly compare...comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated” (p.159). Analysis of data in this study began immediately after the first interview and continued throughout the study.

The constant comparative method utilizes inductive coding strategies to organize, analyze, and process the large amounts of data collected from multiple interviews. There are several coding strategies. This study followed the commonly used three-step coding process beginning with (1) open or descriptive coding; (2) topical or axial coding; and, lastly, (3) analytic or thematic coding (Berg, 2007). It is important to note that researchers with an interpretive perspective often organize and analyze data to uncover patterns, trends, or themes of human behavior, action, or meaning (Berg). For instance, this

study analyzed data to see what themes emerged from the ways that students' civic engagement had been impacted by their institution's culture.

Coding the Data

The central purpose of open coding is to note anything that seems significant to the researcher. Open coding has been referred to as a process of "believing everything and believing nothing" (Strauss, 1987, p. 28). Moreover, in the beginning stages of coding, documenting more is better. As a researcher reviews transcriptions line by line, he or she notes in the margins anything that seems important, not concerned with its future importance or relevance. This was the first step of coding that I applied. Additionally, Strauss suggests that a researcher frequently interrupt the open coding process to write theoretical notes or hunches, which proved useful in my analysis throughout the study. Open coding transitions to topical or categorical coding and ultimately analytic or thematic coding. These transitions occur once open coding saturates the document with repetitive codes (Berg, 2007). Topical coding organizes open codes into groups or categories. Topical codes are then brought together in analytic coding to examine what greater concepts, themes, or theories may be at work that capture the essence of the topical categories. Analytic or thematic codes are then examined in light of previous research and related theories (Berg, 2007).

The coding process has been likened to a funnel. The top of the funnel is the widest part of the opening. The rest of the body of the funnel narrows until eventually the base of the funnel is only a fraction the width of the top. In the same way a funnel works to filter or winnow out substances, the three-step inductive coding process I employed began with a broad base of data until a concept, theme, or theory emerged from the collective data (Straus, 1987). Analysis of data also occurred through the transcription and researcher journaling processes. After each interview I spent time reflecting and writing down hunches, ideas, thoughts, reactions, and questions. These journal entries in turn became an

important set of documents to inform subsequent interviews and analysis while also serving as a road map of my research process (Merriam, 2002).

Trustworthiness and Accuracy of Qualitative Research

Because the nature of this study is concerned with understanding a phenomenon rather than predicting or generalizing findings, the trustworthiness of qualitative research requires that great attention be given to both internal and external validity and the reliability of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Qualitative research is holistic, multi-dimensional, and ever-evolving; thus, internal validity hinges on accurate interpretations of data (Manning & Stage, 2003). For this study, internal validity was measured by how accurately the research findings in this study matched with students' construction of meaning. Having two sets of interviews (individual interviews and photo-elicitation focus groups) over a period of extended time strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings by providing two different sources of data to triangulate or cross reference with identified categories and themes. Data triangulation is considered one of several triangulation methods that can increase internal validity of findings (Patton, 2002).

To further ensure an accurate report of findings, this study also employed member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1986) described member checking as a strategy to enable respondents to give shape to the findings. Each participant received a copy of his or her transcribed interview to review for accuracy of perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Participants corrected any inaccurate statements and provided further insights as they emerged. In addition, peer reviewers examined the data from interview transcriptions and confirmed the findings in this study (Bogdan & Biklen).

Reliability or trustworthiness of qualitative research is concerned with whether the results make sense and are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2002). In order to ensure that results were dependable, I developed an audit trail through my researcher journal that detailed how data were

collected, themes were classified, and decisions were made throughout the study. Merriam (2002) compared this type of authentication to a business in which, just as an auditor authenticates business accounts through review of extensive documentation, readers can authenticate the findings by following the trail of the researcher. The combination of data triangulation, member checking, an audit trail, and peer review supported a rigorous approach to increasing the overall reliability and validity of this study.

Thoughts on External Validity

The external validity of research is typically concerned with the generalizability of the outcomes. It is important to remember that the goal of qualitative research is to “understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). The external validity or accuracy of this study was contingent upon my attempt to provide rich, thick description through two sets of interviews. This method is intended to help the reader decide if the information is applicable to his or her situation, known as reader generalizability. Within this view, the extent to which findings can be applied to other situations is not up to the researcher to determine but to the consumer or the person reading the research (Merriam, 1995). The use of data triangulation, member checking, an audit trail, and peer review in this study ensured that a rigorous approach was employed, thus increasing the overall reliability and validity of this study.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Qualitative research should address how the subjectivity of the researcher shapes the research approach and findings in a study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Peshkin (1988) suggested that researchers should “systematically seek out their subjectivity, not retrospectively when the data have been collected and the analysis is complete, but while their research is actively in progress” (p. 17). Additionally, McEwen (2003) notes that all research has inherent subjectivity. Even quantitative

researchers use their best judgment and values to select the most appropriate instrument for collection and analysis.

In my personal “search of subjectivity” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17), I carried into this study a life-long conviction and philosophy that education is a matter of privilege and stewardship. The reality that less than one percent of the world’s population has the opportunity to receive any form of education magnifies the importance of stewardship. Higher education, in my opinion, has missed the mark if students who graduate with a post-secondary degree do not understand the importance of their roles in contributing to local, national, or global society. All institutions in the U.S., especially land-grant institutions, that neglect to shape, inspire, and graduate engaged citizens are committing a travesty and to some degree a form of educational hypocrisy. I came into this study with experiences in higher education as an instructor of leadership courses, service-learning, and as an administrator of student affairs co-curricular programs and processes that have shown me the potential in creating environments and cultures that implicitly and explicitly influence students towards civic engagement. Conversely, I have also witnessed how institutional environments can also promote individualism, excessive competition, and student entitlement inside and outside the classroom.

In addition, I have witnessed what I believe to be an infiltration of institutional prestige and an obsession with peer and aspirational rankings, an increasing complexity of competing values and roles of educators and administrators (i.e. service, teaching, and research), and an overall culture of consumption. All of these trends seem to inculcate mixed or conflicting messages about education and civic engagement. From my previous research and experiences as an educator, I also have a heightened sensitivity toward the hegemonic nature of traditional pedagogies and departments that do not encourage active learning or the infusion of moral or civic values within scholarship. Lastly, I am committed to student learning and development. As such, I fully support the theories and research on how colleges can

and do positively impact students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), a perspective which in and of itself has inherent biases. All of these experiences and assumptions both guided the design of my interview questions and my interpretations and reactions. Peshkin (1988) and other qualitative researchers describe this dynamic interplay of researcher bias and assumptions with data collection and analysis as part of the reflexive nature of qualitative research. That is, a researcher must learn to understand and balance how his or her experiences, feelings, and convictions positively shape the research process, yet he must also recognize and address how an emotional reaction to participant responses, for instance, can serve as a red flag for further reflection and peer review. Throughout this study, I had conversations with peers, colleagues, and written correspondence in my journal to help me balance how my voice and the voices of my participants were shaping this study.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study were given a consent form informing them of the requirements for participation, methods, scope, and length of the study. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could decline to participate at any point in the study. As part of the consent form, participants also gave permission for me to conduct tape-recorded interviews and use verbatim transcriptions to inform the study. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and descriptors in order to preserve confidentiality. Furthermore, in order to further protect participant confidentiality, all identifying records were kept only as long as necessary to complete the study (Berg, 2007). As with all research conducted in university settings, this study was approved by the human subjects committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to recruiting participants. Though IRB approval and the consent form process are contractually necessary for all research, they do not completely address the dynamic relationship between researcher and participant often reflected in qualitative research (Bogden & Bilken, 2003). This

study also implemented the ethical principles proposed by Bogden and Bilken for qualitative researchers to consider when forming a relationship with participants. Throughout this study I followed these procedures: (1) I attempted to protect the participants' identities in both writing and in verbal reports, giving special discretion to what was reported and to whom so as to not embarrass or harm my participants in any manner; (2) I sought participants' cooperation throughout the study; and (3) I tried to tell the truth in the findings and follow through with the original agreements made with participants. In addition, I anticipated that some of the content shared in this study could be perceived as criticisms of the university the students attended; therefore, I assigned a pseudonym for the university and made efforts to increase its confidentiality. Pictures and themes surrounding common landmarks, buildings, and traditions shared in this study, for example, likely decrease its confidentiality. Although there were no anticipated risks or potential harm in this study, all participants were informed of the confidentiality clause before participating in the study. In addition, I talked to participants about the clause from time to time during the study to make sure that they felt comfortable with the agreed-upon measures, and all responded comfortably and positively to the structure of confidentiality as set up in this study.

The final ethical consideration of importance in this study involved the photo-elicitation assignment. Special instructions were provided for participants on the importance of anonymity when taking pictures of people (see Appendix C). Students that wanted to take pictures of people were instructed to either take pictures of symbols that were representative of special relationships that have shaped their civic engagement while in college or to take pictures of the people in a manner that they could not be identified.

Chapter Summary

Research is not about the argument over which tradition is more important—qualitative, quantitative, or both. Rather, it is about the organic process of examining a problem in literature, creating questions to address the problem, and aligning a research design to best answer the question. Civic engagement is an important mission in higher education. Institutions, however, have become much more complex environments and cultures over the past century. Understanding how institutional environments impact student civic engagement is a topic in only the beginning stages of research. Because the purpose of this study and research questions seek to examine and illustrate the breadth and depth of institutional culture, messages, and experiences as they relate to the enhancement of student civic engagement, qualitative methods were appropriate for a constructivist inquiry.

This chapter provided an overview of the constructivist philosophy, the participant selection process, the data collection and analysis processes, and the steps employed to increase the trustworthiness and accuracy of findings in this study. Concluding this chapter was a review of researcher's voice, biases, and assumptions as well as the unique ethical considerations of this study. I hope the constructivist design utilized in this study and outlined in this chapter leads to further conversations about how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement.

CHAPTER 4

IMPACT, PERCEIVED MESSAGES, AND STUDENT VOICE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of institutional culture on student civic engagement. Institutional culture, especially at large, research-extensive universities, is complex and made up of multiple environments, practices, assumptions, people, departments, beliefs, and traditions. The following research questions were examined to better understand the degree to which students attribute the development of their civic engagement to their experiences at their institution.

1. How does institutional culture impact student civic engagement?
2. What messages, if any, do students perceive from their institution about civic engagement?
3. How do students describe a campus culture that truly enhances student civic engagement?

Based upon an extensive series of individual interviews with traditional-aged college students and follow-up focus groups to discuss the photo-elicitation project, this chapter highlights the degree of impact that institutional culture had on student civic engagement and the types of messages students perceived about civic engagement. Concluding this chapter is a synopsis of students' thoughts and visions for what a campus culture should be like to enhance student civic engagement. All themes that emerged in response to the three research questions were coded until saturation was reached across all sets of data collected in this study. Before presenting the

findings, the chapter begins with a brief introduction of the participants in this study and relevant demographics.

Introduction of the Participants

The purpose of this study called for recruitment of students who were traditional-aged undergraduates (18-24 years old), had at least two years of experience at the university, and had demonstrated a commitment to civic engagement during college. An important criterion for this study was to recruit students who participated in different types of civic engagement on and off campus in order to represent the broad definition and expression of civic engagement in higher education today. The participants were recruited mainly through colleagues who had relationships with these students and could attest to their civic involvement. After a thorough review of 40 recommendations, 12 students were invited to participate based upon diversity of civic engagement type, ethnicity, gender, and age. The participant group breakdown of gender and ethnicity also reflected the general student population of the institution.

Keisha is a fourth-year student majoring in social work whose primary involvement and leadership is in the student chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Phil, a fourth-year student, leads the efforts of the student volunteer programs on and off campus for the university. Phil spent part of his collegiate career at another similar type institution prior to transferring to the university two years ago. Phil's previous institutional experience brought a unique comparative lens to this study. Anna, a third-year student, is heavily involved in the leadership of the Alternative Spring Break program and plans to participate in Teach for America after graduation. Robert is a fifth-year student majoring in landscape architecture and is heavily involved in environmental advocacy and ambassador work for the university; he is also involved with Dance Marathon. Mabel is a third-year student majoring in

social work. She created a mentorship program connecting university students with at-risk local community children. Mabel also serves as the campus coordinator for Teach for America. Art, a fourth-year student, provides leadership and advocacy for Lambda Alliance and serves as an officer for the university Habitat for Humanity program. Art is pursuing a double major in history and geography and plans to do graduate work in law and non-profit organizations.

Maria is third-year student and is actively involved in Young Democrats. She is majoring in international public affairs, serves as an advocate for Latino students, and assists in community initiatives focused on supporting Latino communities. Nicole serves as an officer for the Black Affairs Council and is actively involved in undergraduate research focused on civic issues. Nicole is finishing her second year and is majoring in public relations and speech communications. Thomas is a fourth-year economics/pre-med major who serves on the university judiciary and as a university ambassador. Margaret provides leadership for the College Republicans and advocates for student political engagement at the local and national level. Margaret is a fourth-year student graduating this year with a degree in political science. Roger participates in a number of community service initiatives and provides leadership for a national fraternity focused on service and outreach. Roger, a fourth-year student studying psychology, plans to work with Teach for America after graduation. Laura, the final participant in this study, is completing her second year and is active in global advocacy through a student organization focused on awareness and advocacy for children in underdeveloped countries. Laura also has experience in fund-raising for local community initiatives. She is majoring in religion. For a more detailed review of participant demographics, including a more complete list of civic involvement, see Table 1 and Table 2 on pages 207-208.

Presentation of Data

In order to understand the degree of impact institutional culture has on student civic engagement (as detailed in the first research question), pre-college factors and experiences were explored. College students are not blank slates when they first enter college. Moreover, with the national attention given to service-learning and community service in primary and secondary school settings over the past several years, many of today's students are entering universities with community service experiences and values that likely influence students' decisions to continue civic-related engagement during college (HERI, 2006). Given this trend, this study focused first on participants' experiences prior to college.

Pre-College: The Foundation for Civic Engagement

I had a wonderful foundation...my university allowed me to take that foundation and a little bit at a time stick rebar in it to make it stronger...I was never without a foundation but a little bit at a time my institution has helped strengthen that foundation, transform and refine it...my life long desires for civic engagement I attribute to SEU.

-Robert

Students in this study described their pre-college experiences with civic engagement as a foundation that influenced their desires to continue involvement during college. Students spoke of this foundation concept as stemming from a religious view, family values and modeling of civic engagement, extensive community service experiences, and an intrinsic, personal value. Furthermore, most students realized that their foundation was one of support and privilege; they in turn felt a responsibility to give to others. For several of the participants the foundation of their civic engagement was the integral role of faith and religious teachings focused on humility and service to humanity. One participant's thoughts, specifically about his faith and the teachings of Jesus on civic responsibility, revealed a foundational component that influenced his civic experiences and development in college:

You know my life's pursuit and my faith is to have a heart more like Jesus everyday...I think Jesus was the ultimate civic leader. When you look for an example of the epitome of humble service, when you look for the epitome of one who, you know, who ultimately paid the highest price, would do things for nothing in return and nothing other than his love for others...that's what it's all about. It's what I strive for. What I feel like others with similar beliefs strive for...but you know when seeking a heart like his [Jesus], I want my heart to break like his [Jesus] when I see injustice...I mean that's where my heart comes from and I guess that's where my foundation comes from.

Other participants spoke of faith, calling, and the teachings of a church community as a guiding philosophy for life. Keisha reflected, "I do civic things related that feed my calling. I'm a firm believer that everyone has a calling or will. Those organizations that fit into my calling, into my destiny, I hang onto. And with that came the NAACP and with it I'm now serving on the state board for that." Keisha further explained how her civic engagement is built upon a strong faith foundation: "I've been doing stuff like this since I was a little child. In church, if someone needed to pray, my mom would be like, 'Okay, Keisha, you need to go take your place.' Being in the church groups that I was a part of I had to realize that there's a higher power than me. And knowing that there has to be faith you may not see instant change so definitely the church groups provided me with the faith and the solid foundation."

Family Support & Modeling

The importance of parents and other family members modeling civic engagement and teaching on the importance of service to others was instrumental in laying the pathway for civic engagement in college. Margaret's thoughts capture the importance of parental modeling: "My parents had raised me to be involved in the community so I was trained to do it. I was ready to continue it in college as well." Roger further posited, "...my mom really wanted me to, you know, she wanted me to learn exactly what service is...so she really wanted me to get experience doing community service and helping others and then maybe formulating my own ideas of what I thought service was...this helped me out a lot to have these early experiences with service."

Robert emotively shared how inspirational family members have been in the development of his civic values, “I just had the greatest parents in the world who, I mean my dad is the type of person that would take somebody to the airport at 3:00 in the morning, you know, a neighbor to the airport at 3:00 in the morning. The small things, you know, my mom is the same way just wonderful examples.” Perhaps another student best captures the foundational component of family in her reflection, “Civic engagement is something that I was raised to believe in. My parents taught me that...to whom much is given, much is required. And that is something that I’ve lived by all of my life and probably will continue for the rest of my life...I need to be remembered as a servant for the people. And that’s just something that I’ve been raised on. Foundation was at home.”

Intrinsic Values

Students in this study also spoke to an internal, intrinsic valuing of civic engagement when reflecting upon their pre-college experiences. Mabel recalled, “I think that I’ve always known that this is something that I feel is important. So I feel like that I’ve always had that base within me and have always had that really firm foundation of everything that you’ve been given, you need to give that right back.” Nicole spoke to her great internal need to give or to serve others: “I just can not just not give. I can not just not serve. That’s who I am that’s what I’m made of.” Similarly, Laura reflected, “I guess I’m the type of person when I’m not doing something service-oriented I get restless and feel purposeless. It’s a blessing and a curse...it’s the type of thing that I go to the beach and I’m like, ‘Oh, I’m not doing anything good for the world.’” Phil connected his civic engagement to a foundation and love for serving others and the blessing he receives from service, “...through out my life I’ve loved doing service. I’ve loved

serving people. I've loved being in the community helping as much as I can. Giving back with what I've been blessed."

Pre-College Experiences

As indicated on many reports highlighting the increase of community service and civic related activities in high school (HERI, 2006), the students in this study had pre-college experiences with service that provided a base for further involvement in college. Art summarizes the some of the various types of civic related involvement that many in this study participated in before college: "Some of it I think is coming from the kind of things I did in high school...and a lot of what we did was volunteering. I spent a summer in Mexico helping to build a church. I traveled around doing some things like in both the United States and out. And so when I got to campus I thought, well there's really no reason for me to stop doing this. I enjoy it. I love giving back to people." Likewise, Maria was involved in Latino civic initiatives in her high school and surrounding community, which led her to a pre-college program sponsored by her institution. "Before college," Maria said, "I had in my mind that I was going to get involved in order to increase the number of Latinos in college...I participated in the Latino Youth Program and I met the Latino Director at SEU...I met her through different people because I was very involved in high school in different activities and people in Atlanta."

Laura, like several of the students in this study, had leadership opportunities in civic engagement before college that positively shaped their foundation. Laura recounted, "When I served on the Youth Advisory Council for the city it made me more independent as a part of organizing and mobilizing my peers...And then basically all of my summers I did some sort of service work...the work I did my senior year for Rock n Relief II to benefit Katrina victims, we

worked with the county and ended up raising 15,000 dollars both years...it was huge and it was my life. I breathed and slept this stuff [civic engagement].”

The highly civically engaged students in this study entered college with a foundation of civic involvement, values, and desires to continue their engagement in college. However, as we discussed how institutional culture impacted their civic development and engagement, a three-fold theme of expansion emerged.

Introduction to the Three-Fold Impact: Building Blocks

I would definitely say that SEU provided the opportunity to grow. Before family, church, community provided me with the foundation.”

-Keisha

Students expressed that the culture of their institution has impacted their civic engagement positively in a three-fold manner. With the increased number and variety of experiences in civic engagement, participants grew in their understanding and philosophy of civic concepts, which led to an increase in their sense of effectiveness. Mabel captured this three-fold impact when she shared how institutional culture developed her civic engagement: “So I feel like that I’ve always had that base within me and have always had that really firm foundation of everything that you’ve been given, you need to give that right back. But I’ve definitely found different outlets and different avenues [experiences] to channel that passion to give back since I’ve been in college and I think that that’s what’s changed. And I also found that there’s no avenue that’s any better than the other. If you’re giving back, you’re giving back then I think that that’s great all the way around.” In short, college built upon the existing foundation of civic engagement for students in this study through three interactive building blocks: expanding experiences, expanding understanding, and expanding sense of effectiveness.

Building Block One: Expanding Experiences

Well a lot of it is just the breadth of things you can do at SEU. The fact that we are a larger campus, and maybe smaller campuses can do this too, but I feel like since we are such a big school we can offer a whole variety of activities and get you involved in a lot of different ways. I have had a lot more civic experiences in different ways since high-school.

-Art

So seeing all the things that they [Public Service & Outreach] do – I’m actually working with Latino advisory board, in charge of the website. I see what they’re doing and it’s amazing because they’re doing so much for our communities. When I was in high school I never saw that.

-Maria

As highly engaged and committed students, my participants talked about how their institution offered hundreds of ways to get involved civically on and off campus through student organizations, community service events, and on-campus centers that provide venues for civic involvement and leadership. By becoming civically engaged in several initiatives, students expanded their lens of what civic engagement is and how it can be expressed in various ways. Mabel shared, “...the only thing that I think that has changed about me from pre-college to college is that there’s lots of different ways to give back and you don’t have to have one set way. And originally I did kind of think that the only way to truly help was to help people with health care, the most basic need. But now I kind of see that there’s lots of different ways.” Another student shared how being involved in one program connected her with other organizations that she previously had not considered as civically related: “I participated with Leadershape. It was a good place, because there again, I made my networks and had my opportunities...and just meeting with different organizations...the LGBT board, I never realized how much they had to go through just to be able to function. And so that made me gain sensitivity towards people I wouldn’t have.”

Increased Passion and Purpose

Students in this study also described how opportunities for self-discovery emerged through their participation in civic engagement activities,. Nicole talked about the diverse opportunities to touch other lives and how it has helped her confirm her purpose while in school: “There are so many organizations that people can just access through one person, through one flier. Through one conversation and there are so many opportunities to touch different lives to be involved with something to make your life have more purpose and meaning here at SEU.” Nicole continued her thought on purpose by sharing, “If you don’t explore the civic opportunities at SEU you can’t find exactly what your purpose is.” This moment of self-discovery that Nicole shared was connected to her sense of efficacy as well: “So once people realize what their purpose is within different community settings within SEU then they can ultimately affect the community.”

Through the many civic opportunities available to college students at SEU, participants shared how their passion for civic engagement increased and ultimately led to decisions about vocational purpose. Anna’s thoughts represent this expansion of passion: “My passion for it [civic engagement] has increased so much. My knowledge of what my role can be serving this community and serving communities in the future. It has impacted my job choice after my graduation. So it has definitely changed.” Likewise, another student shared how her increased opportunities for civic engagement has helped her take ownership of her own civic values and beliefs:

My family’s very Catholic and they’ve always had taught us about pro-life and this and that so I’ve always been like that before college. Once I got into college I learned about so many different things through new civic opportunities. For example, I experienced injustice and I’ve seen it in my community and that’s why I become more engaged in my community. I think I’ve started thinking on my own...I still have the values, my family values, I’m not going to leave them behind, but I think I’ve learned to make decisions on

my own and so I think that is one of the reasons why I went to a 9.5 [on a 10 point scale of level of civic engagement compared with high-school self ranking of 6].

Increased Skills

Lastly, having diverse opportunities and experiences for civic engagement in college provided my participants with the ability to build their skill base. Students talked about how their skills and abilities in civic roles increased. As one of my participants said, “Before college I don’t think that I had the full education and skills of what the real world was without mom and dad hovering. In some of my civic involvement, I’ve had to work on things for months in order for it to be where it needed to be. And I think it taught me diligence in just being faithful to a cause...and it [civic opportunities] gives me the opportunity to exercise my leadership skills and to exercise my thought process and my critical thought.”

Building Block Two: Expanding Understanding

It [civic engagement experiences] has exposed me to different types of people, different type people who go through a totally different trajectory than I have. I think that a lot of people are very narrow-minded in the way that they see their lives – they think that a lot of people go through the same thing that they do. And therefore...well I have it okay. I have it easy, you know, I’ve done well, like they should be able to too. And through my experience with these programs, not so much the classes that I’ve taken, have really exposed me to that idea.

–Anna

Curricular and co-curricular programs and involvement in student and academic organizations are a part of the fabric that makes up institutional culture. As students discussed how institutional culture expanded their experiences in civic engagement, they also shared the ways these experiences expanded their understanding of civic engagement. Participants spoke of a narrow understanding or definition of civic engagement prior to college; however, their time in college enhanced and expanded their understanding to include an assortment of civic related issues. Art and others described this intersection of understanding: “I think when I was younger I wouldn’t have included some of the volunteer stuff as part of civic engagement. I think I

merely thought of it in terms of politics truthfully and the activities associated with them, whatever that may be. But since coming to SEU, I've kind of felt there's more of an intertwining between volunteering and civic engagement and that those inherently have some kind of interplay between them."

Mabel described her very singular concept of civic engagement that before college included only attending to physical needs of others, but now attends to mind and spirit:

Like I said, when I got to college there were so many different avenues to give back and things like mentoring is not necessarily a physical need. It's more of an emotional, mental and spiritual need. I guess I found that when I got to college that people don't just need to be healthy. But beyond that, they need fulfillment and every person deserves to have a mentor. I had so many mentors that I guess I didn't realize that I had had throughout my lifetime. I think, like I said, everything that I'd been given I really realized that my entire life's purpose was to give that back and so things like just being a friend to someone and putting time and going to visit them for one hour a week at school. That's just as important as making sure someone gets better from some illness that they might have. I would say that that's been the main eye-opener for when I got to college.

Similarly, Phil shared how his conception of civic engagement has become much more than just policy involvement. "It wasn't until really my sophomore and junior year of college that I started understanding what civic engagement meant. It really didn't make sense to me until then. And at first I thought civic engagement was more policy oriented...and now I'm beginning to realize that civic engagement is any way you can be involved to change the community around you for the better. And motivation to do that."

For others, there was a recognition that their civic experiences expanded their political and social viewpoints. Maria expressed this viewpoint as she reflected on her political and social values, saying, "Before college I was moderate with my political views and my social views and my views about community. Now I've become a little more liberal about different issues especially with politics and things like that. And it's basically because of me going to college and being exposed to different civic-related things."

Roger shared how he has come to view service differently. Through his experiences in college, he has come to see how service is not just about having fun together but doing something that is purposeful and what the community needs, even if it is not going to be something enjoyable in which to participate.

I actually learned a lot in my Alternative Spring Break trip. Then I further learned more at Arch Society. When I was in high school this was my thought – that there are so many volunteering experiences out there that you should just do what you want to do. Do something that's fun and do something that's exciting. But when I came to college I realized that wasn't the case...a lot of things that need to be done aren't fun...service is a lot more than that. You've got to think about it on a different level than that.

From Simple to Critical Understanding

In addition to describing how their narrow views of civic engagement prior to college had expanded, students shared how they moved from a simple to a much more critical understanding of civic engagement and related issues. For some participants, they recognized how critical it is to address important issues to bring about true change in civic engagement. In discussing a relationship with her staff mentor, Keisha spoke about her transformation from simple service to the critical components of advocacy and change:

We've had so many conversations, hours, you know, long conversations that have honestly made me change how I would think. I used to be community service, community service, community service. And although you can be a leader with that and we do need that, she taught me the difference between community service and advocacy. And there is a distinct difference. And she gave me this example and I'll remember it the rest of my life. If I were to give you a paper cut and you were to start bleeding, community service were to aid you by providing you the alcohol and the band-aid. However, the advocacy part would be why did it happen? Did you get help that you needed in time? How can we prevent it? Community service is more reactionary versus advocacy is more proactive. She definitely taught me the distinction between that. And I do give credit to SEU for that.

Similarly, another participant shared, "Some students think they're creating change but they don't really engage themselves in the activities that they are doing. I can go out and say okay I'm going to do a fundraiser activity for Pinewoods but if I'm just going out there to raise money for

them, that's not really creating change...the money may help but you don't really understand the issues behind why they need the money or the support...addressing the issues is creating change.

Thomas attributed his expanded understanding of civic engagement to the interaction between his classes and co-curricular involvement in civic engagement. He said, "I absolutely am 100% from four years ago today when I was sitting here in high school today I am a much better thinker. SEU has made me a much better thinker about civic related issues. I think about it at a much higher level...it's a combination of both my in class and out of class experiences."

Speaking of her Honors professors, Nicole shared, "They really encourage students to think critically and to go out of your box to achieve something. I had an ecology professor who basically told us about all the ecological problems both locally and globally and ways that we can address the problems, apply solutions to them, and solve them here at the university and in Athens. We can do that." All students in this study spoke to some degree how their understanding in philosophy and practice of civic engagement expanded due to the experiences and relationships they have had during college.

Building Block Three: Expanding Sense of Efficacy

SEU really helped me realize what I wanted to do and how to do it effectively. I know now that I want to give my life to some sort of service. I don't care so much about making money or owning an island in the Bahamas or something like that. Me personally, I know I want to do some sort of service. Work for a non-profit organization or do something like that. I think I learned that through SEU.

-Roger

Building upon their empowering experiences and a greater understanding of civic engagement, students in this study talked about the importance of feeling effective in their civic pursuits; that their belief in what they can accomplish has grown significantly since high school; and most importantly, that they have learned how to better apply their skills to be effective

advocates of civic engagement. In thinking about how the culture of his institution has enhanced his civic engagement, Art shared his expanded belief in his ability to make a difference:

I think that it's shown me that some things that I didn't think were possible actually are...and part of that I think is having a group of people, regardless of how large, kind of dedicated to one cause and really working towards it...I keep going back to Habitat, but it's one that I spend a lot of time on while I've been at SEU. And to know that we basically fund a house a year, is just amazing to me. And as a high-school student I would have thought there is no way you can get 100 college students together to do this. It's just not going to happen, but it did.

Margaret, like others in this study, pointed toward an expanded sense of effectiveness in rating her level of civic engagement before and after college: "I would say 4.5 [before college]...just because I know in high school I was involved with organizations such as 4H. I did a lot of community service but I don't know that I was taking anything from it. So now I would rate myself probably at an 8 knowing I can do more for the community..." Thomas' thoughts capture well the group's thoughts on the importance of creating opportunities for students to make positive change and to be effective in their civic pursuits: "SEU has enhanced my civic engagement because by providing me these opportunities to get involved at the community university level it has allowed me to, in my opinion, make an impact and increase my belief in that I can impact positive change on a community."

Aligning Skills to Maximize Impact-Cost Analysis

Closely aligned with students' increased sense of effectiveness was a growing awareness of their ability to align their skills to maximize the impact they could make on their community. Most students became aware that acquiring knowledge and working within one's skills and abilities was important to effect change. Laura's thoughts capture this mindset: "I think one of the things that has changed about me since I've been to SEU is realizing that learning and acquiring knowledge is vital if you want to be effective in civic engagement. I'm so much of the

personality that I see a problem I'm just let me go fix it. Let me just jump in. Not take the time and energy and effort and it's not...I just want to jump. I'm not patient. I'm not very deliberative." Laura, like others, learned that quality of engagement is more important than quantity: "...it [college] has made me realize that I really want to take the time to learn about the issues that I care about and want to fix and that I really enjoy taking that time. I want to feel extremely well-equipped."

Similarly, Thomas applied his learning from economics classes on cost-analysis to his approach to civic engagement, an important characteristic of effectiveness:

But what I've come away learning [in reference to his civic experiences], and this is what I'm talking about when I think much better is the basis of economics is scarce resources, unlimited wants and needs. And you can apply...the lesson of opportunity cost. And I guess you can apply that rationale to any decisions you make. And any decision I make. Any decision I make is a constant, to me, opportunity cost. I'm choosing to do this and what am I giving up to do this? And so it's constantly...whether it's a monetary decision, a use of my skills, whether it's a time decision, any resource, I guess that's now the way...that's the way I think. I really think about efficiency and trying to maximize output and I think more like an economist I guess.

Another participant recognized that in order to be effective in community service, one must do what others need, not always what he thinks should be done: "See now if I had that opportunity to do again [community service project in high-school] I would probably do whatever they needed the most. I wouldn't go out and try to find that one patient because I'm not really qualified to do that. I would have gone to where they needed the filing and I would have done that. And I don't think I understood that until I actually got to college." According to students in this study, making an impact and being effective in civic engagement is having the maturity to recognize what is needed most and having the skills to meet those needs.

Summary of Three Building Blocks

As students in this study described the ways that the culture of their institution—the environments, people, programs, and practices—impacted their civic engagement, it became apparent that their university expanded their experiences, understanding, and sense of efficacy. Having access to a diverse platform of civic opportunities in college expanded their previously limited or narrow views of how civic engagement is expressed on a local, national, and global level. Participating in these diverse experiences for civic engagement gave the students time to build skills and learn about their civic passions and values, which led to an increase in understanding of civic concepts and strategies and fed into their expanded sense of effectiveness.

Perhaps Margaret best captures this three-fold impact when discussing how her civic experiences in college led to a greater understanding of herself and the ability to best apply herself: “I think that what SEU has really done for me is help me figure out how to best use my time and abilities and apply them to whatever issue that I’m working on. I think that I can say that SEU has helped me out a lot in that aspect. Just helping me figure out who I am. And figure out what strengths and weaknesses I have. Figuring out how best I can apply them. And work with a group and work with a team. It’s really helped me figure all of that out.” Likewise, Anna’s thoughts also drive home the importance of experiences that lead to greater knowledge: “I believe that experience(s) increases your knowledge. Experience really enables you to see what’s going on. It’s not just reading a paper. You’re really able to see how it affects people and how it affects you and therefore you’re going to feel more strongly about it. And I think that’s incredibly important.”

University as My Community

As I get into more of my pictures these are pictures and places and views that make me feel connected to the university that kind of give me a sense of – this is my community, I feel a part of this community, I feel empowered to serve it. I feel at one with it in a sense.

-Thomas

I think of civic engagement as getting involved with the community...however you define that...it can include, particularly as a college student I always want to include the campus environment as part of that definition.

-Art

One of the surprise findings for me in this study was the emerging theme that my participants saw themselves as citizens of their university. The above representative quotes from Thomas and Art are reflective of what highly involved and engaged students felt about their university, and more importantly, how the university in many ways is like a city in which students are citizens. At first, I thought this was a very narrow, perhaps immature view of civic engagement as my paradigm includes a much more local, national, and global focus. In recent years, universities have been criticized for neglect of local initiatives; therefore, it is no surprise that my viewpoints on civic engagement as an educator tend to shy away from it being solely university-centric. Over the course of this study, however, I began to see and respect why the students expressed these sentiments and the importance of understanding this concept of “the university as my community.”

Investment in the University

For highly involved students, such as the students in this study, there is a sense of investment and connection to the university that naturally results in viewing it as their own city, their place of citizenry. As Thomas reflected, “The university is my community and I feel very engrossed in the university community...I think they all help in my developing my sense of being a part of the university community.” Robert described the university as his team, the place

he wants to serve and improve: “for lack of a better analogy, that’s your team, that’s the name that’s across your chest. And you want to help serve the university community.” Reflecting on his role as an ambassador to the university, Roger said, “I think it’s a part of my civic engagement just because we are helping out the university where they needed us and we’re representing the university for them and we do service through Arch Society and other forms of service...you could call it community service...we do a lot of things that help the university and the community.”

Challenging University Systems

For these students, investing in the university as a community comes with the responsibility of challenging oppressive systems, advocating for underrepresented populations, and recruiting fellow students to become involved in civic endeavors on and off campus. Because a university in part runs itself similar to a city with coalitions, governing bodies, and political and social systems, Nicole and others in this study see much of their civic engagement role as advocating for underserved and underrepresented populations on campus:

There’s one party that’s focused on building a community, building a better institutions through coalitions, through different student organizations and what not, and in order for the Black community to come together with the White community and with other communities, we need together first. We need to be united first. So in my experiences in Black Affairs Council we’ve been trying to help make people more well-rounded and more united so that when issues come up where the students have to have a strong voice, the Black community can contribute their voice and be part of the bigger community and not just be called, “the Black community.”

Likewise, part of Maria’s social and political engagement is to help the university become stronger advocate for diversity initiatives on and off campus for the sake of graduating citizens:

Diversity in different ways, not only color, but religions and beliefs and everything. A community is diverse. Georgia is diverse. The United States is diverse country so if you want your students to be engaged in the community then you need to understand that after they graduate that their world is not going to be SEU. It’s going to be different and

it's going to have so many things and so many beliefs and so many people. So they have to be prepared for that. Because if they're not prepared their not going to get engaged.

Some students in this study are involved in university judiciary, a group focused on assisting students involved in judicial processes understand their rights and responsibilities. Others are involved in on-campus advocacy organizations that promote equity and fair treatment. As Art described, "It's interesting, because some of it is us trying to educate the larger student body about issues that we as an LGBT community face. And specifically within the campus community and what methods of discrimination we face and all of that." Students like Phil also realize their responsibilities to advocate for social injustices involving university employees and processes as well:

The other mixed message that I kind of infer from our university is that they're training leaders, community leaders, they're training us to go back out into society to be the new generation of business leaders, new generation of science thinkers, all that. And yet our own university doesn't pay its own staff a living wage. That's a big issue to me that the people who work at our university in low income jobs aren't paid a living wage. We got to do something about that.

It is important to note that students in this study do not see their university as exclusively their community. In fact, because of their initial commitment to be citizens of SEU, they have discovered pathways into the greater local community to serve and make a difference. There are numerous policy and practice implications to expand this view of the university as a community: environments and programs can be created to enhance students' civic enegagement on campus. This will be covered in the subsequent chapter. For now, understanding this student viewpoint as an emerging theme in this study provides added weight and emphasis to the types of messages students perceived from their university regarding civic engagement. The theme especially emphasizes the importance of including student voices in university matters and how doing so affects students' civic development. As one participant reflected, "What you can change at the

university, what you can do to make a difference, how far you can go to improve the campus...I guess to me that's part of civic engagement, is you know observing and noticing change, making it a point to bring that up and obviously making a positive change."

Introduction: Civic Engagement Messages

The second part of this research project further explored how institutional culture impacted student civic engagement by understanding what messages, if any, students perceived from their institution about civic engagement. Institutions, especially large research universities, have complex cultures, layered with many assumptions, practices, and beliefs. The insights of these highly engaged, highly-involved students reflect the diversity of messages and values often associated with institutional cultures. Broadly, several types of messages (positive, negative, and mixed) emerged as thematic concepts through the students' individual interviews and follow-up photo-elicitation focus group interviews. In preparation for the second interview, students participated in the research by taking pictures of the different campus messages they perceived about civic engagement. Photographs are intermittently imbedded into the text to provide poignant visual insight into the meaning and depth of the messages perceived by students.

Positive Message: Presence of Civic Engagement

I know that they care about it. The Center for Leadership and Service...I know that since we do have it that there is some sense of need, some sense of desire for some sort of civic engagement, some organization that takes care of civic engagement across campus.

-Roger

I think that SEU does value it on the level...the fact that we have organizations like Dance Marathon, Relay for Life and Hero that are so huge and for the most part I feel like our staff is supportive...I think that that sends a good message.

-Mabel

Institutional cultures are made up on many types of environments, including landmarks, buildings, centers, and places to hold events or activities. Students spoke often of how the

institution promoted a positive message and support for civic engagement by providing places to perform civic engagement, providing buildings and resource centers to support student participation, and providing spaces for civic promotion and awareness. In addition, students spoke about the importance of having organizations and successful programs that promote civic engagement on and off campus; they viewed the presence of these organizations and programs as evidence that civic engagement was valued and important to the institution.

Civic Engagement in Action

Students pointed out the importance of the plaza, the heartbeat of campus, outside the student center as a place to hold rallies, promote civic events, and see other students participating in civic engagement. Phil, like others, spoke of the importance of the stage (see Figure 1) at the student plaza as a place to verbally promote civic engagement and freedom of speech. Having the stage and the plaza in the center of campus symbolically and literally promoted a positive message about civic engagement on campus.



Figure 1. The stage

This picture [above] is of the stage. It kind of depicts that speech, the verbal aspect of civic engagement that the campus supports. They provide this venue for us in the middle of campus in the heart of the plaza where students go through during the day. You have the option to get this stage and be seen and heard. So that's kind of what that represented to me.

-Phil

Thomas and others in the study commented on how the plaza and other places on campus provided opportunities for him and other students to see civic engagement in action, which reminded him often of the importance of civic promotion and engagement (see Figure 2). "You see students physically doing whatever their organization is doing or whatever they're involved with. You see them in the plaza. I would say that this, I guess, has kind of maybe spurred my involvement...I would say seeing other people doing civic engagement is a positive thing."



Figure 2. Students in action

While describing one of his pictures that promoting a positive message, Robert remarked that seeing the lights on late at night in Dance Marathon's office meant that students were hard at work on civic initiatives; he viewed this as a form of encouragement and support.



Figure 3. Lights on

And that's the Dance Marathon office and I always drive home over the bridge [on-campus] and I'll kind of turn around and look and see if the lights are still on (see Figure 3). And if they're on, I'll go help. I knew that either our finance person is putting in money or marketing is doing something...and it told me a few things– the fact that we weren't the only student organization still up doing stuff was a big thing.

-Robert

Phil's detailed description of the plaza and the stage add rich insights into the importance of places to see civic engagement in action on campus and how these visual representations are positively perceived by the students in this study:

...because most of my experiences of civic engagement on-campus have come through the plaza in terms of tabling, going to a volunteer fair, hearing people speak, that's where all our rallies tend to happen. This is kind of where civic engagement happens on-campus – the public face of it for the most part...there's a stage there that they'll spend a lot of time on promoting whatever event they have coming up or promoting their

organization...so the plaza in general is where we have our volunteer fairs and where organizations try to raise awareness for themselves and to publicize. That does become a symbol to me. That's a place that I'll come back to and bring my kids to and say this is where your daddy was a hippie and tried to end world poverty. To me that's the free speech area...that's where...that's the artery for campus. Most students will walk through there during the day. That's where maybe we sometimes try to create civic engagement on campus. So that's really the other symbol I can think of.

Presence of Buildings and Centers

The importance of physical places that house centers, organizations, and offices that support civic related activities also conveyed a sense of importance and support of civic engagement. These physical entities both promoted civic engagement and served as important, symbolic reminders to students in this study that civic engagement is regarded by the institution as a positive activity. Students in this study spoke of buildings across campus that focus on different civic initiatives and have been places of significant activity, development, and support in their civic development. Mabel remarked, "The Center for Leadership and Service, I think is a really great place. I really have been active in this office before and I know the kids that are active and I think that that's great and I love it that there's a whole office dedicated to that."

Maria concurred:

as a freshman I think the first place where I felt at home and I really felt like there was something for me to do civically at SEU was MSP [Multicultural Services & Programs] because of all the different multicultural programs...things like the Hispanic Students Association was under MSP. So that's why I took the picture of MSP because it has contributed to a lot that I'm very involved in on-campus and civically.

Moreover, Roger recognized that having a resource center was symbolic of institutional support: "Because I know that they have this Center for Leadership and Service set up, funded, and in a building. I know that they [the institution] cares about it."

Nicole's description of Memorial Hall reflected the importance of a having a building that focuses on civic engagement (see Figure 4). She insightfully considered how each floor

represented different types of civic engagement and the collective importance of all the components being in one location: “I feel like there’s so many organizations that do advocate for civic engagement on each floor. Whether it’s judicial programs, whether it’s multi-cultural and service programs, whether it’s the Center for Leadership and Service, whether it’s the Greek Life office, African-American Cultural Center, WUOG, every single organization that I have mentioned has done something reflective of civic engagement.” Other students in this study photographed this building, reflecting the importance of a physical place supporting civic engagement.



Figure 4. Memorial hall

Likewise, Keisha and Maria shared how the message of civic engagement was supported through public service programs and centers on campus that house public service initiatives; examples include social work and local outreach programs as shown in Figure 5. Keisha described how a special symbol in the School of Social Work, as well as the entire building, were reflective of the university's support of student civic engagement.



Figure 5. School of Social Work

The picture is inside of the School of Social Work and it says 'Advocates for a Positive Social Change.' And definitely the classes there teach you about your duties and how to get others involved and how to be a leader and how to protect those who don't necessarily have the resources to protect themselves. And this is a nurturing hub for civic engagement. And it's definitely a way that the university shows its support to students who choose to be civically active.

-Keisha

Maria described how a special leadership institute on campus that houses public service and outreach serves a critical need for the community, especially underrepresented communities at the local and state level, and how this entity reminds her that the institution values civic engagement. Maria recounted:

When I first came to the university I did the Latino Youth Program and this [institute] reminds me of a lot of the different outreach programs that they have to students of color. They've had the Latino Youth Program for about five years now I think and so that reminds me a lot of the activities that we did...I think it's one of the things that when I think about the institute it reminds me of the special importance of giving back because the university reached out to me. That's why I'm so involved civically because of all things that I experienced early on through that leadership program.

Presence of Civic Information

Students in this study also shared how their institution positively supported civic engagement through providing space for displaying information on civic engagement. As one student shared, "You can find out from banner boards, street paintings, you can find out from tables at the plaza...there's so many different ways. It's constantly around you." As evidenced by the number of pictures students took of fliers and banners during their photo-elicitation assignment, the various ways available through which to communicate civic information on campus gave these students the impression that civic engagement was a positive thing. Margaret remarked, "I see so many different flyers and different events that seem really, really great...it's very inspirational and it makes me happy to know that other students are as civically involved as I am." Likewise, other students commented on the vast amounts of information posted all over campus and the power of these postings to promote a positive message to the student body, other institutional members, and the surrounding community that civic engagement is important.



Figure 6. Street paintings

As you can see [in Figure 6] there are paintings of different organizations and what they are rallying for and what their messages are to the student body about certain groups and subjects. But I just feel like street painting gives the message to students, faculty and visitors that we are impacting our community in different ways. Whether it's through meetings or through forums or through community service and that's all being depicted through street painting.

-Nicole

In addition to providing spaces for posting information about civic related activities and involvement, several students were impressed that the university provided credible newspapers at little or no cost. Students interpreted the college readership program (see Figure 7) as the university promoting student civic awareness, which for participants in this study is an important component of engagement.



Figure 7. College readership program

I personally think that these were a great addition to the university. I know I use them very frequently. I feel that an aspect of civic engagement is remaining aware of what's going on not only in your university and greater community, but knowing what's going on on a national and global scale. I think this is very important, not only for me personally, but also it's an outlet where I think if you so choose, it's much more readily available for students who want to pursue that.

-Thomas

Likewise, Margaret shared in her focus group that the program showed “the university’s attempt to get students engaged and informed about not just the community, but also the nation and the world.”

Presence of Civic Engagement Organizations & Programs

Wrapping up the final component of the presence of civic engagement theme, students in this study also discussed the importance of participating and seeing civic engagement in action through successful programs and organizations on and off campus. These programs were perceived by my participants as sending a positive message from the institution. Moreover, it is within these organizations and programs that students found great sources of hope and belief that civic engagement is important to the institution as a whole. Mabel shared how being a part of successful programs, such as Habitat for Humanity and Dance Marathon, gave her a sense of hope that students can participate in civic engagement and be supported by the university:

SEU has an excellent group for Habitat...I've done a few builds with them before and gone to some meetings...they do really great things and they have a whole street of just SEU Habitat houses. I think that that is really really excellent that Habitat for Humanity and the Athens community is connected to SEU Habitat...and that there's a group of students who work really diligently towards fund raising and building houses for the community.

During the focus group, Mabel also commented on the significance of the Dance Marathon effort: "I'm a junior now and I've been a part of Dance Marathon for three years now...what we're a part of is just a really an instance of hope for me that students do care and students can come together and make a difference. We raised \$320,000...that we beat last year's total."

Seeing other students in action, committed to civic engagement, and working together for a cause was important to all students in this study. Similar to seeing students in action at the plaza through rallies and protests, seeing a large group of students fundraising all night long for a great cause inspired Robert and others (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. Students in action

I zoomed into the clock and it's like 4:42, there's a little clock in the background so most of those dancing have been going for 19 hours. Those of us on exec have been going for probably 25 plus hours....and not just in terms of money but in terms of participation with people there but the energy level. It's, I guess, in a similar way that Mabel's picture gave her hope this gives me hope. It gives me a sense of what students and the university can do given the opportunity and given the goal put in front of them.

-Robert

The existence of civic engagement organizations and supportive programs yielded a positive message to some students in this study even if they were not directly involved in the programs. Laura commented that the growing popularity of alternative spring break programs (see Figure 9) was inspirational even though she had not participated in one yet.



Figure 9. Alternative Spring Break

This picture is of the Alternative Spring Break publication. I've never been but I've heard phenomenal things about it and I think it is inspiring. I've never tried to go but I know my roommate last year did...she had to get up at the crack of dawn to get in line to sign up. That's inspirational that that many people want to get involved and that this organization is supported by the university.

-Laura

University sponsored internships and transitional programs that encourage first-year student to get involved in the community were other types of programs students said promoted positive messages. Maria shared how life-changing it was for her to complete a political internship sponsored by the institution:

I didn't know that SEU could actually sponsor students to go to things like that. I did a program over the summer called Latinas Learning to Lead in Washington D. C. And what they do is they only choose 22 Latinas all over the United States to do this program for a

week. And they trained us non-stop. We went all over Washington. We met politicians. I met the highest ranking Latina in the army...it's just amazing, it means a lot. It means actually the university supports my civic engagement in the community.

Nicole and others stated that transitional programs focused on connecting students to the community set a positive tone early on by communicating that civic engagement is important: "Dawg Camp Classic City is a program that you basically volunteer the whole week and you're on campus at SEU. That's before your freshmen year so you learn about different opportunities that you can get involved with once you are on campus, including Habitat for Humanity. That's also including the Athens Area Homeless Shelter. It's including Athens Land Trust. It's including Boys and Girls Club...it's such a strong program."

Summary of the Presence of Civic Engagement

Students collectively shared how campus buildings and resource centers reflected a positive message of institutional support. By providing places such as the plaza to engage, students participated in and witnessed civic engagement in action. The physical presence of simple fliers, banners, street paintings, and other forms of information also yielded a positive message that civic engagement is valued by institutional members. Strong programmatic efforts, organizations focused on civic engagement, and internships on and off campus communicated a positive message to students.

Positive Message: Supportive Relationships

He [the Assistant to the President] serves on the board for the mentor program and I feel like for as high up as he is on our university hierarchy for the opportunities that he gives to students to talk and he does so many different programs. I think he alone, has shaped my college career, he is definitely a mentor of mine and of many, many students. I'm not the only one. I could name off five people who should probably be talking more than I should about this and he has influenced everyone that I know that has a heart for service that is doing something that they feel passionately about.

-Mabel

Human relationships are a part of any culture. Institutional cultures have an abundance of different types of people and relationships. From students, faculty, and administrators to professional and non-professional staff, relationships are a critical component of institutional culture. Relationships can exist on individual and aggregate levels. For students in this study, having supportive relationships and/or mentoring relationships, as Mabel described above, was integral to their civic development and growth as well as their overall sense that the institution supported civic engagement. Moreover, students in this study talked about the influence of individual relationships with a staff member, faculty member, or administrator and how those relationships affected their perception of institutional support for civic engagement.

Faculty

Faculty played a key role in encouraging students in this study through advising, mentoring, or inspiring students inside the classroom. Though students often commented on the need to have more faculty involved in civic engagement inside and outside the classroom, all students in this study had at least one significant relationship with a faculty member that influenced his or her civic development. Margaret, like other participants, expressed great respect for professors with whom they had relationships.

I respect him [professor] so much and what he does for the community and his attitude towards just life in general. I just have so much respect for him. And just throughout his personal life he takes care of his wife who is a paraplegic and he just makes time to do everything with the energy that's necessary for it...with him as the advisor of Sigma Alpha Lambda [service organization] also...that's really inspired me here on campus.

The word “inspiration” was often used when students described their relationships with faculty advisors. Laura described her relationship with her research advisor: “She has been inspirational. She is one of those people who needs 48 hours in a day because she's helping people, essentially

all day long...she's helping a lot of times students who are trying to help people. She's one of my favorite people ever. And she's always been really supportive."

The privilege of having access or an "open door" (see Figure 10) to faculty who provide support and encouragement was integral to helping Robert develop his passion and heart for service.

My next picture is of my senior advisors' open door...whenever I'm having an issue I always go out of studio class and peer down the hallway and that's kind of the picture I see whether he's in or not. The reason this is so important to me is because I've been blessed with several professors that have mentored me. He's my senior advisor. He was my professor when we did study abroad. And we have such a relationship that he can cater his advice or encouragement to where he knows where my heart is and where my passion is. And so I'm able to get that encouragement for scholastic or leadership and civic endeavors just because he knows what I'm involved in.

This open door access was symbolic of several students' thoughts on the importance of having faculty relationships in support of their own civic engagement as well as a positive message of institutional support.



Figure 10. Open door

I have been blessed to have several professors play a vital role in my life. I often come down to see if my faculty advisor's door is open. It's not just for school advisement. We have such a relationship that he caters his message to my beliefs and heart.

-Robert (Photo journal statement)

Staff & Administration

For participants in this study, having positive relationships and advising from other staff and administrators on campus was also integral to the development and support of their civic engagement. Staff members in resource centers and institutes that support student civic engagement were also sources of inspiration, encouragement, and advice in helping students know how to best engage in their civic endeavors on and off campus. Maria reflected on her relationship with the Director of Intercultural Affairs and other staff in multicultural programs:

“They’re always very helpful. I think she [director] is very, very helpful. She’s been really, really nice and we even have lunch. At lunch we talk about my civic experiences and things like that. She also helped me get support to go on my political internship.” Nicole described her relationship with her organization’s advisor as “open,” identifying her as someone that she can connect with: “She has influenced my civic engagement. She’s so open. She’s offered opportunities for me. She understands my passion and my drive to serve the community. She’s just a person I can talk to.” Anna said if she had not developed relationships early on with staff advisors, she would not have pursued some civic engagement initiatives as aggressively:

I happened to fall into very good connections with staff [at the Center for Leadership & Service] who encouraged me to say, ‘Like hey, this is a really good opportunity...you should look into this.’ I was really blessed with meeting the right people who encouraged me to go into the places that I would go. I can say that without that encouragement some of these avenues would probably not have been pursued as much.

During a focus group, Phil discussed the significance of his relationship with his advisor in guiding his efforts and appropriately challenging him as he organized volunteer initiatives for the university:

My relationship with her is as a mentor. She definitely keeps me grounded and takes my ideas. Her big thing is focus. She doesn’t like things to be very vague. The more focused the better. She definitely helps to keep that on track and make sure that what I’m doing is not a waste. That’s kind of our relationship...it’s very productive and I feel like she’s got my back for anything too.

Phil’s photograph (see Figure 11) of her office door symbolizes her passion and positive message for student civic engagement. Phil wrote in his photo journal, “I look to my advisor as a mentor and as a university advocate for civic engagement. Her door represents her passionate personality for civic engagement.”



Figure 11. Advisor door

Peer Community

Students are members of the institution and its culture; thus, their relationships with one another make up a component of institutional culture. Positive messages of support for civic engagement developed from supportive relationships with individual students, the peer community, and upperclassmen. Having like-minded peers who also value civic engagement positively impacted students in this study and added to their impression that their institution supported civic engagement. Laura captured this well in her thoughts about her student civic organization: “And the people in this club they just inspire me...they’re all just inspiring because they are so talented at their specific thing and they all have found their specific role in serving. I

guess what I'm saying is I love the SEU community of students...students I have encountered here have really fostered and inspired me...just finding like-minded people who are civically engaged is really important." Supportive relationships with upperclassmen were also influential in setting an early tone of encouraging civic engagement. Art and Mabel shared how older students pointed them toward ways to become civically engaged. Art recalled,

So when I got to SEU I was talking to one of my friends, Rachel, who was a senior at the time and she was involved with judiciary and I was talking with her about how I didn't know what to get involved with...these are my frustrations from high school, these are the kind of things I want to get involved with. She told me about judiciary and she told me that truthfully that it was one organization that she felt, at the time, and I kind of agree with her now that I've been involved in it, that we actually make a substantial difference in the students' lives.

Mabel shared how a sorority member encouraged her to get involved with mentoring younger students in the community: "She was an older girl in sorority and I was just asking her different ways to get involved civically on campus and ways to give back and she said this [mentoring] was her best experience as far as community service."

Keisha's thoughts on the power of peer relationships (see Figure 12) who share in the passions and struggles of civic engagement provided a powerful glimpse of the inspiration, accountability, and positive message of support that students as members of the institution can provide for another.

I took a picture of her because, one, she's just so passionate. She just has such an open heart and willing to learn. And in a way that kind of inspires me. Because you can't necessarily do this thing called civic engagement just on your own passion and just on your own energy because you will be drained and you do need those persons...and just to have someone who's going through the same struggle and the same thought process as I am, just to support me in that manner is such a blessing.



Figure 12. A peer

A picture of a friend doing the work of civic engagement...I love her! We always chat about our duties to our individual causes and I think we all need that sometime.

- Keisha (Photo journal statement)

Summary of Positive Messages

The presence of civic engagement represented through buildings, centers, and other physical evidences of civic engagement in information and in action were perceived as positive messages. Successful programs also conveyed positive messages. Supportive relationships that fostered hope, encouragement, accountability, and support for the civic development and engagement of students in this study were also significant. Having formative relationships with

faculty, staff, like-minded students, and peer groups—all members of the institution—yielded positive institutional messages about the importance of student civic engagement.

Negative Message: Institutional Neglect

I guess the only thing that stops civic engagement as a student...as a student I feel like there is only certain level, no matter how much support I get, no matter how many people agree with me, it all comes down to if this one guy or one guy plus a few of his counterparts agree with me. I doesn't matter if it's 99% to 1% if the 1% aren't with me, I basically...I've got nothing. The most I can do is try and lobby for my cause.

-Thomas

Because institutions are complex environments with competing values and voices, students also perceived negative messages; specifically, students characterized certain instances of what they considered institutional neglect. Institutional neglect was described as something that frustrated, intimidated, and discouraged student civic engagement. Four sub-themes emerged in this study that fed into the overall negative message of institutional neglect: neglect of the student voice, evidenced by lack of interaction with administration and involvement in institutional processes; failure to provide sufficient support for civic engagement; neglect of institutional diversity and integration; and neglect of student friendly systems to encourage student civic involvement. As mentioned earlier, the extent and weight of neglect is greatly heightened by my participants' belief that their university is a major part of their community.

Neglect of Student Voice

Participants felt that the administration did not include students in university processes and policy decisions that greatly impact students' lives. Students in this study indicated that there was a general sense that the administration did not listen to the student voice. Though there were supportive individual relationships with administrators and staff noted, participants indicated that these relationships differ from having an overall administrative culture that genuinely includes the student voice in decision-making. At times, this perception of neglect made students in this

study feel that their civic efforts, especially on-campus, were being deterred. Participants shared direct and indirect stories and examples of ways that their voices had been excluded. Roger recalled a time that he served on a student task force for academic integrity:

...so basically a task force was created so administrators could get student opinions, get students to help out with informing students of the academic honesty policy. Well, if they want student to make decisions and help out then how come student's opinions aren't always valued? How come students can work so hard through a task force to come up with ideas but then they all get rejected and not even like a very pleasant way either. They're just – we're not doing it this way. We're going to go our own way and just hire someone...you know what I mean?

Highly engaged and involved students, such as the ones in this study, commit a great amount of time and energy to serving their university community; therefore, during incidences when there was no response from the administration in matters of civic and student life, students were left to conclude that they were not taken seriously by the very community they are serving.

Lack of Engagement

Margaret and others described a perceived gap between the administration and students in terms of engagement and an ethic of care: "...the administration says that they care about students. Of course...they're supposed to right? It's a university. You would think that they would care about the students that they're taking care of for four years...it's almost like they don't pay attention to what students want or what students need." Margaret continued by saying that in terms of students and the administration, there was unfortunately a sense of us versus them mentality: "SGA [Student Government Association] will have the petitions going on all the time and take them to the administration. But I don't know of maybe one or two instances where that's actually succeeded at changing the minds of the administration. I don't know. It's almost as if we have to work against our administration to get what we want at times."

Art emphasized the importance of the leader of the university being more visible to students and described what he perceived to be a disconnect between the student body and the president.

...but the fact that it seems like the president is always with alumni and never focused on the students and never really engaging with the students. He kind of has this mysterious aura that he's in his office and doesn't do anything. And maybe that's the role of the president. But I know that on-campus that there's a feeling that because we never see him engaging with students, even though he does this open mic thing, he does it once a semester. We're here all the time. And that's not...that doesn't feel like enough...it feels like the university, and what I mean by the university is I mean the administration, is distant from the student body...unless you're in an organization that's supervised by someone that's in administration you don't have one-on-one interactions with them at all.

The perceived disconnect between the administration and students in this study was accentuated by the layout of a campus where the majority of senior administration was on the north side and the locus of student life was on the south side. Robert compared this geographic disconnect to a museum:

When are they going to see students? That's [the north side of campus] is becoming more of this administrative hub rather than academic and social. It's almost like that's the museum area. Don't touch that building. There's the little burgundy velvet rope around them [administration] Maybe you'll come out, type of thing. I realize they are building. They're fundraising and they're lobbying and they're doing all these things but I think it's important that they interact with students.

Keisha voiced concerns over the perceived absence of the administration and the literal distance between students and administration: "I don't understand why our president and why our vice president, even though he is moving to Memorial within four years, are so far away from the students. Way too far away. Just the physical layout (see Figure 13). If I needed to reach you right now, if the Red and Black [school newspaper] is trying to write down some words and I need somebody just to talk to, it's like you're too far. Where are you? I have to catch a bus, the orbit, to catch east campus express to get to you."



Figure 13. Senior administration

This is very far away from where students actually work and fellowship.

-Keisha (Photo journal statement)

No Voice in Policies & Practices

Students described how certain policies and practices, specifically those pertinent to students' civic initiatives, made them feel stripped of their ability to make a difference. Thomas reflected,

This kind of goes back to why I feel deterred: Now what can I do about that [the change in alcohol policies]? Well, through university judiciary, because we are the people who deal with these things, we have...we are a union basically. We wrote a letter. We've written a couple of letters. We've all signed it. We said we are the people that deal with this [alcohol incidences and sanctions] is the way we used to do it. We feel the policy...the way we've handled these things we feel was effective. Why are you changing this? We weren't even consulted. We were left out of the process. The

university executive council made this decision. We are the people who handle these decisions and were completely left out in the cold...here are our documented reasons why we think this is not good...It didn't matter.

Other students who are involved in academic policies and processes felt similarly about their lack of adequate input. Roger commented, "We're saying academic integrity is all this...we're saying we want students involved in the academic process, yet you isolate them in the procedures and on matters that affect them most." In discussing a recent policy change, Keisha pointed out another reason why students in this study felt that neglect of the student voice impacted their civic development and engagement:

You know you're robbing me of that leadership training and of that time to speak for myself and to stress the importance of, you know, what ever concern...you have neglected me the opportunity to lobby my peers to speak on an issue that's important to me. You made a decision for me and you didn't let me get a chance to engage with you on a particular issue. I thought that was so cheap. Like it was on the front page of the student newspaper and we were like, 'What happened?' Students weren't involved in the research process...nothing...can we at least take a poll?

Neglect of Sufficient Support

Another form of institutional neglect that communicated a negative message about student civic engagement was the neglect of sufficient support. The lack of sufficient support manifested in several ways, including the lack of adequate support for proven, effective programs promoting civic engagement. Anna described her disappointment that university did not make it possible for all students to participate in the welcome week civic program. Anna also voiced her frustration at the lack of adequate support for alternative spring break trips when student demand far outweighed the number of total spaces on the trips:

I'm a site leader for ASB [Alternative Spring Break] and I want to put a voice to how the demand for ASB and the actual ability we have to serve that demand. I think it was mentioned that in order to put your application in you have to get there 4 hours early and there was still a line wrapped the building...it's very frustrating because there is such a good reputation for this program and it's an awesome opportunity and so many people are interested, but we just don't have the funds to create the demand.

Likewise, Art felt that the university was missing an important opportunity to really encourage civic engagement by not providing sufficient support for alternative spring break trips: “But they have hundreds of students who try to get on the trip and they can’t take all of them. Why doesn’t SEU sponsor more of those trips? Why don’t we put more money into something that there is a strong interest and it does great things...it doesn’t make sense to me that we don’t support these programs that we [university] say that we value. Wouldn’t it be great if SEU could put together 50 ASB trips?”

Inadequate Student Spaces

“We need more student space. We need office space. Storage. Twenty-four hour access to work all hours of the night because that’s sometime the only time we have to do it,” said Robert, and other students in this study echoed his sentiments. The lack of adequate meeting spaces for student organizations to plan, program, and promote student civic initiatives was also considered a deterrent for students promoting civic engagement. During a focus group, Keisha vividly described the dilemma that many student advocacy organizations face on campus:

...a growing number of students don’t have a home. They are doing work of social justice, and civic engagement. You have National Council of Negro Women. You have the Black Male Leadership Society. You have Latin Empowerment that don’t have a home and we can’t take them all in. And the ones that we can take we have to throw together a computer set or a printer that doesn’t work so they can at least have a home and some place to stay. (see Figure 14)

Keisha further highlighted the severity of the issue, “It’s a space issue and it’s a fight because there are some groups that honestly feel like they can’t do what they need to do successfully because they don’t have an advisor and they don’t have a place to stay. They don’t have the resources to get out to that group of population to which they serve.”



Figure 14. Lack of adequate space

Some participants in my study even joked about how the back of their cars have become storage space for organizations without a home on campus, making it difficult to feel organized and effective. Margaret shared during her photo-elicitation focus group, “Yeah, I wish I would have taken a picture of the back of my car where all my stuff is for my political organization.” Lack of sufficient space for programming discouraged civic promotion and engagement as Art pointed out: “But it makes it difficult sometimes. And there’ve been a number of events that we’ve tried to plan for different things where all the rooms in the SLC will be booked and they’ll try to put us in Caldwell Hall. No one knows where Caldwell Hall is on campus. No one will come to an event that you program in that hall. So you might as well just not even have the event

if they put you there.” Art also noted the poor location and lack of visibility of meeting spaces for student organizations: “...the fact that most of them are in that basement area and that no one really ever goes down there and that the rooms are not all that well lit and they’re not all that well organized and they’re hard to get to. Really you’re forced to meet in the SLC if you want the kind of visibility you assume you want for an event.”

Lack of Sufficient Buy-In & Engagement

Even though participants in this study sensed support for civic engagement in some pockets across campus, they felt that at a large institution there should be a greater level of participation and buy-in by a members of the institution as Phil described, “I feel like...at a research institution, a 32,000 person campus, we’re very lacking in man-power I guess, not man-power but in invested students. I feel like it should be a lot more obvious on campus when you’ve got this big of a school that enough students should be involved and enough of the faculty should care about civic engagement. The absence of faculty and administrators’ support as expressed through attendance and participation yielded a sense of what Robert described as a “kick in the gut” for students passionate about civic causes:

...so that was just a kind of kick in the gut in terms...just different support for trying to get people to come to Dance Marathon. We’re at a plateau of where we are...when you look at the upper echelon Dance Marathons [at other universities] that are raising millions and millions of dollars a year they have a heavy faculty and alumni involvement where we struggle...I think we have 35 faculty coming, which is sadly the most we’ve ever had. It’s difficult.

As noted by my participants, faculty are very influential so their lack of support for civic engagement initiatives sends out a strong negative message: “We’re doing a faculty talent show [to fundraise for Habitat] and we struggled to get faculty to support us and we’re one of the organizations that people know about and generally support our mission...so what does that say?”

In addition to the perception that faculty and administrators do not provide adequate support for civic engagement, students also noted the lack of adequate civic engagement among their fellow students. Nicole commented, “I guess major issues hindering student civic engagement...I guess a major issue has to be the inaction...the students not taking action on civic engagement. They’re not...they know that it’s important to be civically involved but they don’t take action.” Similarly, Mabel pointed out how disheartening it was for student advocates to witness the apathy of other students as she described a common occurrence at the plaza:

You’ll also see students avoiding that area so that they don’t have to be pressured or talked to about those things and that’s kind of disheartening when you have people who care so much, passing out flier after flier and so excited to get more people involved in what they feel passionately about as far as service goes and then watching another student just walk by ignore the person.

Neglect of Institutional Diversity and Integration

Serving as advocates for all kinds of civic causes, participants recognized that having the ability to work and relate to, for example, different ethnicities, cultures, religions, or socioeconomic backgrounds was critical to promoting and enhancing civic engagement. Students shared how the institution needed to do a better job of integrating and embracing diversity across campus. Otherwise, as Phil described, students tend to navigate only towards peers like them and possibly miss out on connecting in the community:

Whereas perhaps if the diversity was integrated better [here] and brought them into a bigger cultural experience while there in college and were asked to step out of their boundaries of what they’re used to, their comfort zones, then perhaps that would increase their likelihood of getting involved in more diverse oriented projects in the community. They would be more eager to, more so than just like willing to, eager to at that point to explore that culture even more.

The lack of diversity and integration was pointed out in various ways as a negative message concerning civic engagement.

Compartmentalization

While students recognized the need to recruit more students of color to a predominately white campus, they also pointed toward the lack of initiatives to better facilitate integration among the diverse groups already on campus. Anna and others shared their sense of a divided, compartmentalized campus:

Well yes it is definitely compartmentalized. There's sororities and fraternities. There's a whole different top organization that they go under compared to people that are white that are in sororities and fraternities. And there's just very...in my opinion, there's very few barriers that break through to connect those. And not only where these offices and institutions...or offices and organizations are located, but also among our student culture...it's divided even though it definitely shouldn't be.

Nicole pointed out the lack of representation in student government and the message this sends to students of color: “SGA is having their elections right now ...one party is specifically for Greek, um, basically they have all their platforms leaning toward the Greek population and it's not even the Black Greeks or the Latino Greeks. It's the White Greeks...I'm offended in two ways because they're not serving the other minorities on campus, which are Black people, Latino people, disabled people. And they're also not serving all Greeks either. So, I mean, what I'm trying to say is that SGA parties are focused on different platforms, but they're not necessarily focused on the right ones.”

Lack of Advocacy

Students also discussed the lack of advocacy for the underrepresented groups on campus whose members have been subjected to explicit or implicit forms of discrimination. In reaction to a racially insensitive cartoon in the school newspaper, Keisha shared in a focus group how she wished that more student leaders, organizations, and administrators would have stood up for underrepresented groups in response to the cartoon:

That's a direct slap in the face to students like myself who are working, not only, to promote Black History Month, but Latino Heritage Month, and going from that Asian American Month. It's a direct contradiction from students to students who are working in social justice and civic engagement that you would even have the nerve to put this up there. We're not even going on that one...Many people didn't even notice it and sometimes it gets very difficult for leaders of color to be the only ones to address issues like this. I would love for the College Republicans or Democrats or the Campus Green Party or not just the 'black girl' bringing up the issue about a racially motivated or targeted incident. I wish that everyone could be inclusive in this campus and if it offends one it could possibly, potentially offend everyone. Because I emailed the editor about this and it almost seemed like it was only the black girl and the black group had an issue with this, when clearly this is just offensive all around the board.

Nicole commented on implicit ways the university needed to be more proactive in advocating for underrepresented groups (see Figure 15): "This [picture] was a picture of the stairs at Tate. Stairs and hills within campus, it really provides a barrier...it poses a barrier to students, especially disabled students, and I feel like there's not much, from my perspective anyway, there's not much rallying going on as far as for people with disabilities on campus. Nicole told the focus group about her experience being on crutches for several weeks. She described how she learned about the experience of students who need ADA access and how underserved they must feel on campus and in the community: "And I feel like someone with a disability would have to do this [take pictures of all places on campus] almost in order to really send the message across that we need to be a friendly campus to people with disabilities."



Figure 15. Lack of adequate ADA access

The students also described a feeling that diversity was not adequately promoted inside the classroom. Professors and students had opportunities to promote discourse on the importance of diversity, said Anna, but would often fail to include other cultures other than majority population viewpoints: “And when I say the majority influence at a research institution like this and our student population, the majority of us are white. And when we look at different aspects of Native American art or Asian-American art, you know, our perspective is skewed by that. And there is very little talk of that [in the classroom] And to me that is so important.”

Anna connected this pattern with the power and privilege of majority populations:

We’re very color-blind. And very blind to the privilege that we have and the privilege that I walk into a classroom and I sit down and I’m among the 80% majority of this

classroom. And when I speak I don't have to worry about that, oh, I'm not going to mess it up for the other white people in my class if I say something stupid compared to another person of another race.

Maria concurred and admitted she often felt reluctant to share her viewpoints in class for fear of being seen as the minority opinion: "And sometimes in my classes I think professors are not ready to face the fact that classes at SEU are becoming more diverse...I think it was very hard because professors, not all professors are open minded and when you make comments they always look at you like, 'oh, you're saying that because you're a minority.'"

In discussing what issues the campus needs to address in order to enhance civic engagement, Maria captured the heart of the students' perception in regard to better integrating diversity into the daily life of the campus: "More diversity. I mean it's a diverse environment but it needs more engagement in the communities and between students...I think that that has helped me in my civic engagement to understand people who are different from me...I want to understand other people...but some students are so closed minded. So I would say promote more diversity."

Neglect of Student Friendly Systems for Engagement

The last form of institutional neglect discussed in this study centered on the challenges of navigating institutional systems to accomplish civic initiatives. Institutions are notorious for bureaucratic structures and decentralized environments. Students described the challenges of navigating the threads of institutional bureaucracy and the feelings that emerged from unnecessary hoops and organizational policies that frustrated their pursuit of civic engagement. Students described not only their personal challenges but their overall perception of how much effort and energy it takes for students to make things happen. In regard to addressing civic issues on campus, Thomas said,

I don't feel empowered...I maybe think about how much effort and how many breaks I'm going to have to catch and how long it will take to impact that change...and I think about all that and how many hurdles I'm going to have to jump and kind of how many things are have to go my way and how much effort and time its going to take and if I'm pretty passionate about some civic or social issues or policies am I gonna go to the next level.

Laura shared her frustration with the extreme difficulties of fundraising for a great cause: "You know we are trying to recruit a true representation of SEU to contribute to this great cause [Invisible Children] and its just so frustrating the time and energy to navigate for only \$2,000 dollars."

To some degree students understand that this is a part of their training to learn how to navigate systems, but at some point the experience is no longer a learning opportunity and becomes simply series of messages of deterrence. If students are doing something that is focused on civic engagement, there should be smoother systems in place to move things along. According to Robert, "I think that there are a lot of student civic organizations that have to jump through too many hoops to get an event done...you have to jump through hoops even though we're trying to do a good thing."

Navigating Student Organization Systems

Problems with navigating the system were not exclusive to working with administrators and staff. Student leaders and organizations emulated the institution's de-centralization through the existence of similar but functionally separate civic programs. This created confusion, especially for students seeking to become involved as Phil highlighted: "Navigating the system is challenging because for one thing there's really not a system to navigate and you are limited to what you see because the volunteer organization is not a full representation for the organizations focused on service and outreach. There are plenty...we've made a list front and back of organizations that aren't in our organization that are concerned with the same issues as we are

that should be under us.” Moreover, Phil and others noted that turf battles go on between like-minded organizations over resources and participants rather than those organizations joining in a collaborative effort to reinforce a message of student civic engagement:

[In response to bringing service organizations together under one unit] They [students] were more concerned with their own single organization than they were with their collaboration with the support that they got from their university. Like I was saying they only see that they have their own organization. As long as their own organization is accomplishing something that they want it to then why do they need a centralized system... There’s just an attitude of, I want this to happen so I’m going to create my own organization for it. Rather than, I want this to happen, oh here is an organization that has similar interest, maybe I can get involved and then make this organization better and as well get my interest served through it. I’ve had many conversations with several of the service oriented organizations and they are a dime a dozen and nobody really knows what any of them do. They all pretty much do the same thing. It becomes watered down and it becomes ineffective at that point.

Other students noted how the Student Government Association is reflective of the bureaucratic system of the university, making it just as difficult and confusing to request support and funding, especially for service events. In recognizing the need to have a more centralized, user friendly student system for civic involvement, Margaret added that joining student organizations involved too many extensive interviews and application processes for involvement. She said this creates unhealthy competition and confusion among students:

Really it was almost difficult to get involved at SEU. There’s hundreds of opportunities to get involved but I wasn’t used to having to be interviewed for every activity that you want to do. I wasn’t used to the competition to get involved in different activities... When I first tried to get involved on campus it was very discouraging because I remember telling my mom, ‘I want to get involved on campus, but it seems to me that no organization wants me.’

The unfortunate reality of having difficult-to-navigate systems of student involvement was the rich get richer mentality. Students who get involved on campus right away are rewarded with more opportunities than students who do not get involved until their second year. These students find it challenging to get leadership positions, even in service organizations. This creates, as

some students in this study described, a “leadership posse” where one sees the same group of students doing all the work, especially with civic related activities. This is one of the biggest reasons why Anna promotes the university welcome week camp: “And that’s why I’m such an advocate for this camp. Because honestly if you don’t start freshmen year...and you don’t have anything on your resume, if you apply for a position as a sophomore, you’re going to have extremely low chances of getting that position.” Students across the board recognized the privilege they had by getting involved early, but they also recognized the problems the system creates for recruiting more students to be involved. Margaret described how she benefited from her early involvement:

And it just seemed that my second year here every organization that I was part of recognized that I could be the next leader. So I took on leadership roles in every organization. And it’s almost as if they recognize that you’re willing to do the work for it. I think that a lot of times that is how a lot of students are on-campus...I guess you could consider it a leadership posse of sorts.

Furthermore, several students in this study commented on the need to create a friendlier, more inclusive system of involvement to better recruit students who did not get involved their first year of college.

Summary of Negative Messages

Overall, the message of institutional neglect was perceived as a message that often times deterred, frustrated, and discouraged students from civic engagement. The message of institutional neglect was manifested through the neglect of adequate student inclusion, interaction, and voice in university matters; the neglect of sufficient support to promote student civic engagement; the neglect of adequate diversity integration and advocacy in campus life; and lastly, the neglect of efficient, practical systems to encourage and promote student civic engagement.

Mixed Message: Service in the Shadows

Just like you're [the president] talking about the year in review, just like your speaking about the athletic accomplishments, the Truman Scholars, the Rhodes Scholars, the things like that, I feel like the civic engagement is a part of the dynamic of SEU...I feel like there's not a real place in any SEU publication or literature highlighting these things.

-Robert

Mixed messages are considered conflicting or contradicting messages in culture.

Institutions of all types struggle with competing values and messages that may or may not be perceived by their members as congruent with the mission. As participants in this study discussed and reflected on the messages they perceived about civic engagement from their institution, it became increasingly evident there were competing forces: namely, the attention and resources for sports; the pursuit of prestige through academics and research; and the presence of student consumption, all of which the students said cast a shadow over civic engagement.

In the Shadows of Sports

Most members of the institution acknowledge that this university is known for its athletics, especially its football program. Though students in this study acknowledged many of the positives of building a sense of campus community and pride through sports, the attention, focus, and resources given to sports programs instead of civic programs were considered mixed messages. They felt sports placed civic engagement in the shadows of importance. As Nicole described, "I think sports and academics are in the forefront. Civic engagement is in the background." When encouraged to further describe this sentiment, Nicole and others in the study shared that despite the positives of having a center and a building that houses several civic-related organizations, there seemed to still be a strong message on campus that sports overshadowed civic engagement. Keisha captured this perception well: "They [administration] put so much focus on athletics and athletes and some of them do do well. Some of them do give

back to the community. But their focus on football and how they want all their students to participate in all these home football games.” The same energy, however, is not given to civic initiatives. As Keisha explained,

You [administration] don’t stress the importance of signing up for the SOAR awards [civic and leadership celebration event], signing up or sponsoring Leadership SEU, you know, come to the conferences. That’s a contradiction. We give an extra day off for fall break for that [football game in Florida]. I’m like...could you give a day off for service? Can we call it a service day? And we get all the ‘PR’ on it?

Anna further emphasized the conflict and contradiction of messages on game day and the influential culture of football that overshadows the civic responsibilities of the campus community:

Well, a lot of people, a lot of people, spend a lot of time drinking and getting drunk. Just tailgating on campus. What message is that sending? You can look at two different sides. One says, oh we support our athletes and we support doing this and it’s all coming together. Another perspective, you see the amount of trash we create, we see the huge amount of alcohol that is consumed by students, not just students, parents and alumni and everything else. And you know a lot of disrespect goes on during those games of people slurring back and forth and people getting arrested downtown after the games and it’s...football Saturdays are football Saturdays and you’re viewed as very different...it’s just a very influential culture that happens there.

Further reinforcing the group’s perception of civic engagement being in the shadows of sports was an exchange that occurred in one of the focus groups to share and discuss participants’ photo-elicitation experiences. Roger shared a picture of the building that houses most of the civic engagement organizations on campus, which he considered, as did others, to be a positive message of support for civic engagement. The picture was taken, however, at a time that the sun casts a shadow of the football stadium on the side of the building (see Figure 16). As he shared the picture, other students in the focus group saw it as a symbolic reflection of the power and presence of sports on campus overshadowing civic engagement, further reinforcing the perception of the strong presence of sports on campus. Students also commented that though

this building was near the center of campus, it seemed to compete with the center-piece of campus: the football stadium.



Figure 16. In the shadows

Civic engagement was only highlighted in the news, it seemed to students, when athletics was involved. This exemplified another way students saw their service as being in the shadows of sports. During a focus group, Art described a common occurrence involving athletics and community service:

The only thing that I would point out is that with Habitat it's interesting that the university itself doesn't often milk our involvement with it, but the athletic association does. Every summer the football players go out and build on a house and every single year there are pictures published of that. Never university students in general. Never anybody else...but it's always our athletes, not the general student population. If you really look at who's contributing the most money, time, effort, it's not the athletes. And

I'm not faulting them. They have a lot on their plate that they need to take care of. But they're the ones receiving the recognition for it.

Other students shared similar stories of how promotion and attention was given to service only when athletes were involved, which sends out a conflicting message about the importance of civic engagement.

Students also discussed the unequal distribution of resources for athletic facilities versus renovation or expansion of public service buildings and programs. As one participant described,

However, the outside of Tucker Hall is a direct contradiction from SEU on how much they actually care about civic engagement and those persons who plan on pursuing a career in that field. What else can you say about Tucker Hall? It used to be an old dorm. You have walls that you can hear things from. Sometimes the computers don't work. You don't have a computer lab....it's on the fourth floor...I have a hard time digesting the fact that we can spend, yet another \$25 million on something that deals with athletics and athletes when we have a college and school that clearly needs some attention.

In the Shadows of the Pursuit of Prestige

The strong presence of and emphasis on sports was not the only mixed message that cast a shadow over the importance of civic engagement. Students in this study discussed how the pursuit of prestige overshadowed the civic mission of the institution. Students in this study acknowledge that academics and research are important parts of the academy and are necessary components of fundraising, but students also believe they should not overshadow service to the community. Highlighting this perception and overemphasis on prestige, Anna photographed a building on campus during her photo elicitation assignment that symbolized to her the prominence, attention, and focus of academic prestige versus public service related degrees and programs (see Figure 17).

This picture kind of tells a lot for me. It's the picture of the College of Business and it speaks in a number of ways to me. Everybody is pretty much aware that the college of business here is topped ranked and very well known throughout the United States and I think it kind of speaks to the culture that is at SEU, like we were speaking earlier, very individualistic and nobody really cares or knows about the school of social work or

education or student affairs. We hear about the College of Business and not much on public service so it's so very prominent and in a really, really nice building so I think that is kind of a symbol of culture.



Figure 17. College of Business

To me this represents the culture of prestige and competition at SEU; everyone knows about the business school, very publicized and well-known, but schools of social work and other public service disciplines are not as known by the student body.

-Anna (Photo journal statement)

The Pursuit of Academics & Research

For many students in this study, the pursuit of academic success and building the endowment were believed to be the most important initiatives to the senior administration. During one focus group, a picture was shared that appeared to be a charity sign in a very public place on the administrative side of campus. The participant who shared the picture was initially

encouraged that a sign posted on the north side of campus showed that the university cared about the community. Upon further discussion, it became evident that it was an endowment fundraiser sign for the university. Thomas shared his thoughts on the necessity of endowments but also discussed his perceived sense that fundraising for the university overshadows other civic fundraisers on campus:

And something that kind of highlighted that in particular was the picture that you have of the fundraiser sign...that money is for the South East University Endowment Fund which is money that's basically going to support the university and clearly that has been one of the administration's major points of interest the past ten years – building this endowment because endowments are becoming such a large part in determining an academic settings viability. That's how a lot of universities are compared, how strong is your endowment. And obviously the endowment can do a lot of great things to expand and help build upon a university.

But what's interesting to me, I'm not at all saying that the intentions are bad or that the endowment is bad, but it's interesting that the one fundraiser that they [administration] pick and the one thing that they really like to emphasis in a very public place in the middle of north campus is their own fundraising for the university...I think that the fact that there's no other signs, there's no other real indicators anywhere on campus, there's really no other visible fundraising marker like for Dance Marathon, for Habitat, for Relay for Life...for any other civic cause that is raising money...the only one that gets university approved to be in a public spot where everyone can see it is their own endowment.

For Thomas and others in this study, this reflected an overemphasis on the pursuit of academic prestige and rankings (see Figure 18).



Figure 18. The endowment

The pursuit of research, students noted, also affected faculty's involvement in civic-related initiatives. Art and others perceived that many faculty at their institution are focused mainly on their research agendas and discipline expertise and did not have time to engage civically with students because of the pressures to publish: "I think that some of it is this feeling of...well, I entered academia so I can only work ten hours a week and if you try to cut into my free time, no go away, leave me alone. Some of it's also this pressure on them. And I understand the pressure is there and you can't do anything to get rid of it...it's research, publish, research, publish." Maria perceived that few professors shared a passion for civic engagement because of

the pressures to do research: “It’s only a few professors that share that passion...I think they are too worried about their own research to do service.”

Mabel perhaps best captured the way students in this study perceived civic engagement to be in the shadows of the institutional pursuit of prestige:

I would say I think that as I see it from the student perspective is what is placed as more important, more than likely, by most of the faculty and administration are things like are you a Ramsey Scholar above are you spending 10 hours a week in the community or with some sort of work? Are you doing your part to give back? But as a university the things that we brag about are how many people we send abroad, how many such and such scholars we have, how many people are in our honors program.

Sadly, for some students in this study, even service was perceived as a mechanism to make the institution look more prestigious. Art described his frustration with the ways some students are spotlighted: “It feels like the students that are willing to go out there and do the work to get themselves into positions where they’re civically engaged are being used by the university to make it look good. It doesn’t feel like we are being supported by the university. It feels like we’re being used.”

In the Shadows of Student Consumption

“It’s this habit of entitlement...yeah, I always get fast food, the food comes like this and the internet comes up like this (snapping fingers) things just come to you fast. You get everything when you want it.” As Laura described the challenges of getting students to focus on something beyond themselves, participants in this study recognized how the culture of student consumption seemed to cast a shadow over civic engagement. Student consumption was described by students in this study in a variety of ways, including the spirit of individualism and competitiveness, using service to pad resumes, and being overly consumed by social and entertainment activities. Consumption behaviors and activities focused only on personal gain were, according to my participants, counterintuitive to the values of civic engagement.

Moreover, part of civic advocacy for students in this study is how they inform, engage, and recruit other students to support causes; therefore, they were highly in tune with the pulse of campus life and pointed out how it seemed that the message of civic engagement was in the background of the presence of consumptive practices.

The Spirit of Individualism and Competition for Personal Gain

The college environment in general has messages focused on individual pursuits and achievements. Students acknowledged that the pursuit of excellence and healthy competition between one another was inherently a good thing; however, students in this study perceived that students as a whole were overly focused on individual gain. As Maria described, “I would say that it is okay to be competitive. You want to be your best at everything you do. But that doesn’t mean that you’re just going to forget about your community because you’re trying to be the best.” Maria attributed this consumption practice to students who are less involved in creating change: “Not that many students are really involved because they really want to create change. Or because they really understand civic engagement; rather, they are just looking out for their own interests. After they graduate they are looking for what is just going to happen to them. But not what can they bring to the community.” Anna connected the spirit of individualism she perceived in student culture to privilege:

I think that a lot of students are very, like we said, very individualized and like I have everything. I have this privilege and I deserve this. I haven’t done anything wrong. I have this and why do I have the responsibility to go and serve someone else. And so very mixed messages as far as, well, I deserve this and I deserve good things and I don’t have any responsibility.

According to Mabel, this spirit of individualism starts the first year in college as students arrive and begin their own journey. She explained how it creates a gap between students and community:

This picture (see Figure 19) is of government housing that is directly located across the street from the freshmen high rises on Baxter Street. My feeling on this picture is that I think there is an aspect of irony that the freshmen live right next to government housing and the aspect that freshmen enter college with all the hopes and dreams of any college student just starting off fresh...tons of opportunities, picking your major, thinking about internships, thinking about your future job and directly located next to a population living in a low income community. There's such a gap there.



Figure 19. Government housing

This community is located across from the freshmen high rises. How can those with unlimited opportunity [students] be across the street from those without much opportunity and not be motivated to change?

-Mabel (Photo journal statement)

As Mabel and others reflected, the pursuit of individualism and personal gain can become such a spirit of consumption that students are completely unaware or unaffected by what surrounds them in the community: "Sometimes I think there is a little bit of a disconnect with the

student population, and the fact that that is government housing, but we're [students] too consumed by our own thing to notice. I don't necessarily know if that affects everyone or maybe if everyone knows that that is government housing. But I know now as an upperclassman and as I pass by it definitely has an affect on me."

Padding Resumes with Service

Students also shared their interactions with and overall perception of students who pursue service or other civic initiatives in order to "pad" resumes, further highlighting the student culture of consumption. Maria recounted how she believed that many students at her university are missing out on true civic engagement because they are coming into it focused on their own ambitions: "So many of the students here at SEU don't really quite get that yet. They maybe get involved because it's going to look good on their resume after they graduate." Phil reflected on the differences in student cultures between his present and previous institution when it came to the concept of doing service for oneself:

That's a big difference I saw coming from Georgia Tech to here. I just filled out my application to go to Peace Corps, and so at Georgia Tech that was a very encouraged thing – it was a very much a 'wow, oh your going to Peace Corps, I've always wanted to do that but I really need to finish my engineering degree kind of thing.' My friends were supportive of it, that kind of thing. Then you get here and most people are like, 'Peace Corps, why would you do that? You don't even make money with Peace Corps'. I'm like, 'yeah, it's kind of a different benefit for me.' They're [students] like, 'oh, you'll get into a good grad school. It will look great on your resume.' They go straight to what...how can this benefit me, more so than how can you benefit the world.

The pursuit of resume padding was connected to the idea of "short-cutting," or students looking for the easiest ways to do something service related so they can put it on their resume. Robert reflected on this idea as he shared a campus symbol of short-cutting, connecting it to his perception that students are consuming service like anything else (see Figure 20):

They [students] might get behind something but they're willing to take a short-cut. They're looking for the easiest way. Being a landscape architect major I noticed these

[short-cut paths] all the time. This is right next to the law library and this original shortcut started when they were renovating Old College. And it just takes a few people to start that. It gets worn down. People follow. And then the ivy can't grow back and the dwarf mondo grass under it takes years to grow back. And in the fall [university employees] respriged all of that area and put up some yellow tape to kind of re-grow that and it didn't work. I think it's kind of the negative side of a student or anyone, just looking for the easiest way, the fastest way to do something.



Figure 20. Short-cuts

Robert continued his thoughts by posing a question in his reflection of short-cuts and padding of resumes that further highlighted the presence of student consumption and civic engagement: “Then organizations have to cater to those people because you need numbers, you need support. So how do you cater to the ones that want to do just enough to have it on their resume or just enough to get out of it what they want to get out of it?” This question and others

reflected the sentiment in this group of students that service was overshadowed at times by the culture of consumption. As Phil described, “I feel like sometimes the university looks towards...or especially we as students look towards service as a resume builder or a leadership builder. We don’t look at it as what good can I do in my community. It’s like what can I be a leader of?”

Excess Entertainment and Social Consumption

“When I decided to come down here and it was definitely a, well, you know, we need to make sure you know what alcohol tolerance is so that you don’t do stupid things while you’re down there - just assuming that the first thing that I would do here was drink. And every time I tell anyone I’m from this university they just automatically assume that I’m a partier.” As Art reflected on that party school image that is prevalent on the campus, others in this study noted the looming presence of the downtown atmosphere and its emphasis on consumption of resources and entertainment. “So whether it’s party school, whether it’s downtown,” Robert shared, “you know what are we [the university] sending across as far as literature as an institution on civic things as a way to combat the images of Broad Street at 2 a.m.?” The downtown atmosphere served as a symbol of excess consumption and time spent socializing, which participants believed contributed to the overall culture of student consumption. Several students mentioned that downtown partying for students started Thursday and went through Sunday and often times lasted until late at night; therefore, the sheer amount of time spent in entertainment was a strong message for consumption. Mabel took a picture of a downtown bar near campus (see Figure 21) that for her symbolized a message of consumption that she believed is communicated early and often to incoming students: “As incoming freshmen come to our

university, this is one of the first things that they hear about and see—a lot of bars downtown.

How can we find a higher purpose than this party mentality?”



Figure 21. Downtown bar

Other students noted the myriad advertisements, especially in the school newspaper, placed by businesses vying for student consumers. Anna also shared how she believed the student culture is also surrounded by messages of excess and student consumption:

There is a huge target for college consumers. Look at the amount of credit cards offered us, look at the apartments in this town...student housing is luxury student housing. The sad thing that I won't get on but we're taking away from lower income housing that people need, that families need. And you can't find an apartment in this town for less than ridiculous amounts of money. So that is definitely an influence.

In short, students felt that neither the downtown atmosphere nor the need to engage in entertainment and socializing were unhealthy in moderation; rather, it was the excess of time spent and excess consumption that served as a conflicting messages about student civic engagement as Phil described: “I feel like the culture at SEU is very consumerist...it’s kind of obvious with downtown. Students go downtown to consume things too much. They really don’t go downtown for services. I feel like we created our downtown more so than the downtown has created us. I feel like the downtown has reacted to the student culture which is a very consumptive lifestyle...but outside of that there’s not much. So I feel like that kind of describes the culture.”

Mixed Message: The Invisibility of Civic Engagement

So I wonder really, are the messages [about civic engagement] even being made clear? Because it seems hidden.

-Art

That’s a big message. Civic engagement is not a real big message.

-Nicole

As the participants expressed in the statements above, the final mixed message perceived by students in this study is the hidden or invisible nature of civic engagement on campus. This perception seemed to stem from the lack of visible symbols, literature, advertising, and recognition of civic engagement by the university. Phil noted that the lack of evident messages about civic engagement was in turn a mixed message: “But it kind of stands to me as well that perhaps the fact that our university doesn’t seem to champion community service through advertising through programs. It doesn’t seem to champion that cause for it to even be a mixed message.”

Lack of Promotion

Students shared that one of the ways that civic engagement took on an invisible quality on campus came from a lack of promotion through institutional or student news media. Roger and others shared their frustration about more attention being given to negative occurrences versus the positive, civic contributions made by students: “For people who are trying to get a good impression of our university, the [student newspaper] is not serving any purpose that is beneficial to civic engagement...they usually only focus on the negative things.” Likewise Robert shared how service organizations who do good things and are expecting news coverage of a positive event are usurped when something negative occurs on campus: “...so we just did an incredible thing [in the community] and we’re expecting press but then somebody does something stupid and that’s front page. So it’s stuff like that. It’s double-sided.”

Maria felt that the university did not do a very good job of informing incoming students about all the civic opportunities and resources that exist on campus; thus, many students were unaware: “I think sometimes the University tries to...they tell you about only certain activities to get involved in and things like that, but they don’t necessarily tell you about the Georgia Center or that we have a Fanning Institute or we have a Carver Institute.” Another participant described the invisible nature of service-learning on campus due to a lack of publicity: “It’s there but it’s not emphasized. It’s not publicized. When you have the diverse disciplines that our university offers we should be able to change our community just through service-learning.” Moreover, institutional members demonstrating and modeling civic engagement were not as prevalent or visible as they should be. As Thomas described, “Maybe there needs to be more faculty and administrative leadership actually demonstrating their civic engagement. I can say that I don’t

think I have ever seen faculty or administrators campaigning for or leading civic engagement projects or activities or actively campaigning for a cause.”

Students in this study described a lack of student awareness about major civic opportunities, which contributed to the sense that civic engagement was invisible on campus. Art explained through this anecdote:

The fact that we have a masters in non-profit and the majority of students don't know that...the majority of students aren't told about it. I've had a couple of friends that graduated with it which is the only reason I even know it exists and I'm interested in non-profit organizations. One would assume that we've got this group of academics who have an expertise in this area and kind of how to organize and run effectively non-profits. I never hear from them. I don't know if they stay over in their little corner or what but it's weird to me that that's not more widely known.

Similarly, in reflecting on a partnership between the university and the town focused on improving social conditions in the local community, Thomas said he believed few students knew about it due to a lack of promotion: “It's very rare for a student to know about it. Honestly, I didn't even know the name [of the initiative] had changed. So, yeah, I would say not many students know about it...and, like I said, it starts with—in my opinion—the tone will be set, the vision will be set by, the administration.”

The Invisible Nature of the Pillars

The institution that these civically engaged students attended has a well-known landmark on campus that has three pillars representing wisdom, justice, and moderation, all of which symbolize the civic mission of this land-grant institution. Cultures are often reflected through symbols such as statues or landmarks. For institutions, these landmarks communicate messages that may or may not reflect the values, behaviors, and practices of the institution. As students described this well-known landmark, which is recognized institution-wide as the emblem of the university, they shared how they believed few students were aware of the meaning of the pillars.

Margaret commented, “I’m speaking on behalf of the majority of students when I would say that they wouldn’t know. I think that students know more about the superstition than the history of the pillars. I think that they know that they’re not supposed to walk under it until they graduate.” Like Margaret, students in this study talked more about the general student body’s superstition and perception of achievement attached to the landmark more so than any acknowledgement or understanding of the civic pillars as Mabel interjected, “I guess it could be institutionally not as recognized. It might just also be the college atmosphere. Everyone talks about how you can’t walk under the arch. That’s said on every campus tour...probably the pillars of wisdom, justice and moderation are said on every campus tour, but that’s more glazed over.”

During his photo-elicitation assignment, Robert documented evidence of students practicing the superstition at the Arch (see Figure 22):

I also have a picture of the Arch kind of. But I focused more on the tradition of not walking through it. I paralleled that of almost where Mabel was going with the wisdom, justice, moderation and walking through at the end and how a lot of people do walk around it and that’s why the steps are weathered like they are. After it rains there’s puddles right next to it and you can see how the steps are worn from people walking around it...it’s a superstition and a pride thing. I’m not going to walk through it until I graduate.



Figure 22. Footsteps

In further reflection, Robert felt that these footsteps were not only indicative of the superstition but that students are not aware of the civic traditions that they could become a part of at the university: “I feel like there’s a huge gap between students getting behind something like that [the known traditions of the landmark] and the traditions that are civic in nature that students don’t know that they could get behind.” In discussing the lack of student awareness about the civic nature of the pillars, Keisha suggested the possibility that this is likely a reflection of the invisible nature of civic engagement on campus: “And that’s probably sad...that it’s [the Arch symbol] on everything but it may not hold that much civic value...to people who I know it doesn’t hold that much value except for if it’s on your degree that means you graduated from the

[South East University] which is a major research institution, but other than that, I can't really give it much anything else."

Summary of Mixed Messages

In any institutional culture, there are competing voices, values, practices, and beliefs that can lead to mixed messages about what is truly valued. This is especially true for large, research universities. Perceived messages that were considered mixed or conflicting concerning civic engagement centered on the overshadowing presence of sports, the pursuit of prestige through academics, and the conflicting and contradictory behaviors of student consumption, all of which casts civic engagement into the background or shadows of campus life. The lack of promotion and evident messages of civic engagement on campus led to the invisible nature of civic engagement, which for students in this study was also considered a mixed message in itself.

Student Voice: A Vision of Institutional Integration & Engagement

I would have to say [if I could create a campus culture] it would support an academically rigorous class but with that let students know how it's important to have civic engagement in their lives. All courses would have focus on how you can affect the community through that course. For instance, speech classes could train students how to politically persuade people to deliberate in a thoughtful manner and to become a better persuasive person in order to implement new ideas in a community. With English being able to read and write effectively is what's going to help anyone with civic engagement, but it would be better if students learn how to read and write effectively and teach others how to read and write. Research would be focused on improving the community so whatever course it may be there's a way you can tie it to community service, to civic engagement.

-Nicole

The third and final research question focused on how participants described a campus culture that would truly enhance student civic engagement. Asking students to envision and describe what this campus culture would look like engendered continued reflection on the positive, negative, and mixed messages of their institution; the task also as offered students a platform to share their voice both individually and collectively, a component often overlooked in

civic engagement literature. Two themes emerged from students' insights and considerations: the first theme focused on the systematic integration of civic engagement through curricular and co-curricular programs, while the second theme described the importance of institutional engagement among all members of the institution.

Systematic Integration of Civic Engagement

As Nicole envisioned a campus integrating service-learning throughout all courses and disciplines in the quotation introducing this section, other students in this study agreed that curricular service requirements were absolutely critical to laying the groundwork for promoting a culture of civic engagement on campus. "It would have strong academics obviously but it would be very community oriented. Like students would actually have to apply what their learning, not only what they're learning, but actually go out and try to apply it in the community," reflected Maria. Mabel and others shared how they believed the classroom was a great platform for graduating students who valued civic engagement:

But also I think maybe incorporating it [service-learning, community service requirements] in the curriculum would be really, really excellent in whatever way. And some classes do that. I know business classes that require community service hours. What greater message is that than you're going into the business world, you're going to make money some day, but could you please also take this time out and do some community service? That's a good message...just need more of it.

According to students in this study, infusing service-learning and/or community service hours requirements into general education courses would systematically integrate civic engagement into the curriculum and ensure students are exposed to service in the classroom.

Service Requirements for Graduation

Without hesitation, many participants said that a campus culture championing civic engagement should require students participate in service in order to progress toward their degree and ultimately graduate. The possibility of a collective student body focus on service in

the community elicited great excitement for students in this study as Art shared, “But I also think that if, for example SEU, passed some kind of resolution saying every student in order to graduate has to do 10 hours. And you think about what 26,000 students doing 10 hours would mean for this community. Even if they resent every minute of it the impact that that would immediately have here is enormous.” Nicole envisioned an even grander scale of service integration with semester requirements: “I guess in order to even go through each semester you would have to do some type of community service. So in order for you to even pass the semester, advance to the next semester, you’d have to do community service.” Maria’s ideal college campus would have multicultural requirements to promote diversity education and training for civic engagement, “We [my college] would have multicultural requirements that we would have to meet...I think it’s important...so that students can have a broad perspective about civic things.”

Service Promotion in Research and Faculty Development

Part of systematically integrating civic engagement and related activities into a campus culture, students said, is to connect community outreach and service into faculty and undergraduate research. Laura explained, “So one of the things that I would really stress is research. Research to improve lives...what I’m saying is combining research and service-learning opportunities. Even within CURO [undergraduate research program] if there could be a service-learning research component I think that would be fascinating.” Roger pointed out simple yet effective ways departments on his ideal campus could promote civic engagement through a campus-wide environmental focus: “I would get different departments to research into how they could make more out of the power that they use, the water that they waste. How can we make the campus more green? How could you conserve more energy?” Along with research and

tenure processes that promote and value civic engagement, students said that providing faculty development opportunities for professors to be trained in service-learning pedagogy is a necessary part of promoting civic engagement. Maria said, "...training our professors and making our professors understand that they play a part of service-learning and why it's important for students to be engaged in their community is needed to promote civic engagement on campus."

Co-Curricular Integration

Students in this study insightfully pointed out the need to integrate civic engagement into co-curricular processes and systems on campus to enhance a culture of student civic engagement. In addition to curricular requirements, Roger and other participants believed that creating service requirements for all student organizations was important:

If there was a student government association I would...if a new group was trying to make an organization I would put a requirement that they would have to do some sort of service involved with it...a minimum amount of service hours per member. That would make...a lot of people are part of student organizations, at least one. If they [administration] really wanted service to be a part of it [the culture] I would say, you know what, make it mandatory otherwise you can't be a student organization. You can't get funded and this would force students to go do service and learn more about service.

"And just as a freshman has to take that mandatory alcohol online course," Mabel suggested, "maybe make them sit through a 101 on service and community or that type of thing." Phil added that requirements for service should apply to the para-professional staff as well: "I feel like there should be simple things as requiring RAs in dorms to have semesterly service project to inspire students to know that there is opportunities to serve in the community." As part of the systematic integration of civic engagement, students often spoke about the importance of having co-curricular traditions and programs that focus on civic involvement, especially for first year students. These ideas are highlighted in the following section.

Civic Engagement Traditions

For some students in this study, their connections to civic engagement on and off campus came through a welcome week program for incoming students. The service program, which is one specific track of the larger pre-college program, focuses for one week on connecting students interested in civic opportunities to the community. These groups of first year students are led by upperclassmen who mentor them and lead the projects during the week before school begins. Students are introduced not only to the university but also to the many ways that they can become civically engaged while in college. Anna reflected on her experience as a participant and as an upperclassmen mentor of the welcome week camp and how it could become a wonderful tradition to champion student civic engagement and set the tone early:

It [welcome week camp program focused on service] just really breaks down and makes service and coming to college a very real and personal experience. You're able to bond with the people you're working with. You're able to bond with those upperclassmen counselors. And really ask some tough questions that you haven't seen before. A lot of these kids are used to going into, let's say, their idea of service is maybe serving in a food bank compared to we'll take them into a homeless shelter and we'll cook dinner and we'll serve. And so it's just very different....in my experience, the majority of them [first year students] after the week were so excited and just had so many more questions... they wanted this to continue was the overall consensus. And the majority of them started their freshman year and got involved civically because they knew who to talk to and they had already kind of had a foot in the door. And so I would say compared to people who did not go through this program, these students [first years] were much more involved and much more confident, I think is another thing, of how to do this. Because another problem at a place like [my institution] is that we are so big and it is very intimidating as a first-year student.

Robert also shared the importance of instilling a welcome week tradition of service to enhance civic engagement: "For me it was [the welcome week camp] which opened up my eyes to all these things and all these resources and all these people [university staff] and upperclassmen leaders saying, 'Try this, do this [service program].' This was just the greatest experience I had. It changed my life." Having civic related co-curricular traditions for first-year students, such as

the welcome week camp described by my participants, is an important way to promote a campus tradition and culture that can foster and enhance student civic engagement. Anna captures the significance of such a civic tradition as the first experience students have on campus: “And I also want to add that it is such a crucial time period. Because this is before these students have gotten into actual classes. It’s before any assumptions have been made. They are fresh and they want to know what college is all about. And it’s just a really key period to be able to influence students toward civic involvement.”

Students in this study envisioned a campus where all first year students attended a welcome week program similar to this university’s pre-college camp. They hoped, however, it could be a much larger program focused on student groups bonding and learning about the university and the community by spending all week doing different service projects throughout the community. This type of tradition sets the tone for civic engagement and, as many students alluded to in this study, helps first-year students feel connected and a part of an otherwise large, research institution.

Students also spoke about other types of co-curricular traditions that would more comprehensively focus students on the importance of student civic engagement. They suggested having university-wide service days, weeks, or months focused on the university giving back to the community. Phil emphasized this strategy as a way to plug students into the community: “To increase the role of service in the student life we’re going to have a week of service – a campus wide week of service. My institution is going to partner with the community during that week and then through that develop a program for students to be plugged into the community that way.” Other students, like Mabel, shared similar thoughts: “That would be awesome to have a month devoted towards it...your school has an entire month where they just promote. We have a

volunteer fair once a year. Maybe doing that three times a year. And getting people out there.”

Even one day events, such as a day focused on encouraging voting by transporting all students to their precincts to promote political engagement, would strengthen the message of student civic engagement. As Keisha explained, “I think it would show a strong message that we [the university] care about your academic training, but we also care about how you invest in the community by voting.”

Centralization of Civic Engagement

Some of the participants in this study shared their vision of a centralized civic engagement center that brought the various campus organizations together both organizationally and collaboratively. Centralization, the students said, would create a stronger press toward civic engagement as well as promote student friendly ways to understand how to get involved civically on and off campus. Laura shared this vision as she thought about the campus environment she would design to promote civic engagement:

And I think another thing about Laura’s University would be much more pooling of resources, much more centralization of...more organization in terms of knowing of where to go...here’s a list of all of the organizations that have volunteer opportunities in Athens. There should be a desk, a central room, where you ask and you say, go talk to this person. She’s in charge of international service. She’s in charge of Athens service. She’s the liaison between all the campus orgs in service...there needs to be one physical location...a new center.

Not only would this type of center focus all the resources but it would also cut back on duplicate and competing efforts and confusing systems on large campuses that often frustrate students seeking involvement. Anna commented,

I think that it would be awesome if the university somehow could endorse like a whole idea of civic engagement. Because there’s so many programs in this office and at this university as a whole who do a lot of the same things but we don’t know about each other because it’s so big and it’s so compartmentalized.

Likewise, fueling Phil's vision of bringing all civic resources, student service organizations, and institutional programs together is his recognition of the current lack of organizational focus and collaboration, which in his opinion has prevented a strong culture for civic engagement. As Phil described, "a stronger centralized organization could get a lot more done. Your volunteers aren't as spread and you're not competing with yourself in another organization." It is in this spirit of collaboration that Laura and other undergraduate students from the university created a program to bring all student civic related organizations together to help students understand how to get plugged in and utilizing their specific gifts and talents to address social conditions in the local community. Laura described this program, which in my opinion aligns with other student comments about centralization to better enhance student civic engagement:

Step UP is an event to raise awareness of global and local issues and organizations addressing those issues on this campus and to inspire the SEU student body to take action. And sort of our tag line is what if 32,000 students were inspired to use their talents to change the world...our philosophy is to basically get all of these people to come together for this very multi-faceted day where we're also going to have the organizations on campus that have some sort of cause and whether it's advocacy or directly volunteer level, volunteer on either a local or a global level, represent themselves. They'll have booths and we're working on coming up with a unique sign up system and it hasn't really been figured out yet, where we look at specifically how to plug in students based upon their particular gifts.

The students' vision for a campus culture that promotes student civic engagement does not stop with the systematic integration of service into curricular and co-curricular processes. In fact, it is only the beginning. The following section explores how students in this study described the role of institutional interaction and engagement in promoting student civic engagement.

Institutional Engagement

The students' process of envisioning a campus culture that enhances student civic engagement was filled with descriptions of all institutional members engaging in community service together. When describing this idea of institutional interaction and engagement, students

in this study specifically emphasized the importance of having consistent interaction with faculty and administrators in service activities, the importance of the president's example and endorsement, and the role of student leadership and responsibility in promoting civic engagement.

Interaction with Faculty & Administrators

Faculty and administrators play a significant role in modeling civic engagement and inspiring students to be citizens on the ideal campus described by Margaret and others: "I think that seeing staff members and faculty and faculty actually caring about the community they're a part of...really getting involved on campus, in the lives of students. Maybe the people that aren't as self-motivated as others, if they saw their professor out there participating in civic engagement maybe it would inspire them to the same as well." Moreover, without faculty and staff engagement, enhancing student civic engagement would be difficult. Roger explained,

If we didn't have faculty staff involvement it wouldn't be possible because without them you can't spread the message as well. Just like academic integrity, if faculty aren't on board then students obviously aren't on board. It's the same thing. Faculty relay messages to students in a much better way than peers can in some instances. Because faculty see their students all the time. They can very easily be able to explain why the school's trying to do...That's what I would do. I would definitely get faculty involved and staff.

The potential influence of the senior administrators "rolling up their sleeves" with students was echoed often by participants. As he described his ideal campus, Robert said, "I think that I would like to see them get in their jeans and t-shirts and work with us. I think they're there for, just like the professors are, they're there because they care and yeah they get paid a whole lot more. But in conversations they're so passionate about students and the institution. And I think they would embrace interaction with them." Likewise, Thomas shared, "I think they [senior administration] would have the potential to have a very positive impact if students saw

administration more visibly actively rolling up their sleeves and getting personally involved in any endeavor that they so choose.”

The vision of interaction with faculty and staff doing civic engagement together is perhaps best captured by Anna as she reflected on what would be occur on a campus focused on civic engagement: “I envision like this big open area [on campus] with lots of opportunities for people to sit down and speak with one another – like conversational areas to talk about civic issues and projects. Students, faculty, administrators, people who work here. Like an open environment where we feel free to talk to each other, and discuss issues, and help each other out in the community.”

President’s Example & Endorsement

The president of any institution, according to my participants, is critical to setting the tone for a campus culture of civic engagement. The president has the ability to spin new initiatives into motion that motivate all members of the institution. Students described the literal and symbolic importance of the president modeling community service in simple, practical ways:

If you [the president] can make me feel like I can be as important as you and make me feel like we’re pretty much doing the same thing...we’re both hammering nails into a Habitat House. That’s going to inspire me and I imagine a lot more...it makes the mission seem greater...because I mean, he’s obviously got a lot to do, he’s an important guy, if he’s taking the time to do this one thing I can maybe take three hours of my time to do this too. So I think that would be something that I would definitely think that could really change things. The more I think about it I think it could have a really positive impact on students.

Art further highlighted the significance of the president’s example: “If he [the president] would take a Saturday morning to go help build a house for three hours. Challenge the students and not just say it, but be there too it would be powerful.”

Students in this study also recognized the role the president’s endorsement could play in increasing civic engagement and interaction on and off campus through to the attention this

position receives from local and campus media as Phil shared, “But I feel like it would be a big step...the [school newspaper] eats up the president, and so for him to go to a Volunteer SEU event or for him to go to a volunteer service fair and speak kind of thing would generate publicity and create a buzz about civic engagement.” Moreover, Keisha and other students recognized the influence a president has in promoting an institutional culture of civic engagement:

So if the president shows a spirit of service, the attitude would then be reflected upon the staff, the administration. I [the president] make it of importance. I’m going to hire people who make it of importance. And we are all going to be on the same plane, the same board. So, yes, I want the president to be engaged with the students just as much as I want the custodial staff.

Keisha emphasized again the simple yet effective ways the president of a large campus can influence student civic engagement: “I don’t necessarily buy the excuse that the campus is so large that you know I can’t really be involved with my students. You can stop by [hub for civic organizations] once a month. You can stop by the student center once a month...definitely a president who wants to make interaction with the students a priority.”

Student Responsibility

The final component comprising the theme of institutional engagement and interaction is the role and responsibility of students to motivate one another toward civic engagement. Students are members of the institution and play an integral role in shaping and developing the culture of an institution, as students in this study recognized. The importance of peer influence, student leadership, and responsibility in spurring on one another was evident throughout the study as Thomas described, “I think students are most effective when they are trying to influence other students that they have personal relationships with. I think that, I guess if you want to put it on

the students, we could do a better job of encouraging or spurring more civic engagement from our friends that we have personal relationships with to join in.”

In keeping with the spirit of “university as my community” and the opportunities for civic engagement on campus, Keisha commented that the students’ responsibility and role on her present campus and envisioned campus was to advocate for civic engagement:

So as far as making civic engagement important and student responsibility we have to make it of importance. We have to educate ourselves. We have to stress to the administration that this is something that’s needed. Even if it takes a movement, and I stress to people, in order to make change as it pertains to social work and as it pertains to social consciousness, it’s going to have to be a movement. We can’t just do programs. That means that you’re going to have to challenge policy...and you’re [students] going to have to take action.

Laura, too, believed that it was the responsibility of students as members of the institution to step up: “I think that students do need to talk to administrators, get their voices heard. It takes a lot of persistence. It’s hard for you to put in the time to set up a meeting with the president and be like, this needs to be done. But I think that getting our voices heard, voicing our frustrations, voicing our concerns, voicing the things that we really like, the things that are really positive, is a good way to do that.”

Chapter Summary

Students in this study were taken on a highly reflective, explorative journey of their college culture and experiences related to their civic development and engagement. Students entered college with a strong foundation for civic engagement through faith, family, and extensive community service experiences. The positive impact of institutional culture on the foundation of civic engagement for these students was three-fold. Students described how the their university helped build upon their civic foundation by expanding their civic experiences

through diverse opportunities, by expanding their understanding of what civic engagement means, and by expanding their sense of effectiveness and practice of civic engagement.

Students perceived positive, negative, and mixed messages about civic engagement from their institution. The presence of civic engagement through places to engage and physical structures that house civic organizations, and the presence of supportive relationships with other members of the institution, were messages of institutional support for civic engagement. The negative messages centered on different forms of what students described as institutional neglect: neglect of student voice and inclusion, neglect of sufficient support, neglect of diversity integration, and neglect of student friendly systems for civic involvement. Each of these types of neglect sent a message that discouraged civic engagement. Students shared that the strong emphasis on sports, the pursuit of institutional prestige, and the prevalence of excessive student consumption were mixed messages about the importance of civic engagement. The other mixed message involved the lack of visibility for civic engagement on campus based upon a lack of promotion and emphasis.

Finally, in sharing their vision for ways that a campus culture can enhance student civic engagement, students in this study had more opportunities to reflect on the impact of culture and perceived messages. This also afforded them the opportunity to collectively share their voices and perspectives about higher education and civic engagement, an area in literature that is often overlooked. In describing a campus culture that effectively promotes civic engagement, students in this study shared a vision of integrating service and civic learning within the curricular and co-curricular systems as well as a vision of civic engagement among all members of the institution.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Students in this study were invited on an explorative journey, examining their institutional culture and experiences as related to the development of their civic engagement. This highly reflective study produced a generous amount of rich data on students' viewpoints, perspectives, and perceptions on the multiple environments, practices, and relationships that make up an institutional culture. Several themes emerged that invite further discussion. The following chapter contains my interpretation of the findings interwoven with related literature. Many of the findings in this study contribute to an area of civic engagement and institutional culture literature that is still in its developmental stages: an exploration of large research-extensive institutions' impact on student civic engagement. Findings related to impact, messages perceived, and the student voice will be discussed, closing with implications for practice, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Impact on Student Civic Engagement

To understand institutional impact on student civic engagement, I studied highly involved students who were civically engaged and had spent enough time at South East University (SEU) to provide a wealth of insights, experiences, and impressions of their university and its culture. To understand the degree of impact SEU had on their civic engagement, students shared with me their background, involvement, and understanding of civic engagement before college. Students in this study individually and collectively described the foundational values of civic engagement

that they brought with them to college. They came into college, as research on incoming students has recently shown, with a hunger for service and desire to get involved in the community (HERI, 2006). Having these foundational insights gave me a baseline and ability to better assess and attribute how the culture of their institution had impacted students in this study.

Three-Fold Impact

A three-fold impact on civic development and engagement was described by students in this study. Students came into college with a foundation for civic engagement. Their institution, however, expanded their limited scope of experiences, understanding, and sense of effectiveness. SEU provided opportunities and ways to express civic engagement beyond what students described as limited and simple forms of service before college. Offering various civic opportunities for students both inside and outside the classroom provided a venue for students to explore their skill base and foster a greater sense of self-understanding, passion, and values. This in turn provided students a greater sense of what they could do to make a difference in their community. The connection students made to the importance of early civic involvement during college and the perceived positive impact SEU had on their civic engagement is supported by Astin's theory (1984) and research on student involvement, which explains that the more students get involved in curricular and co-curricular activities in college, the more likely they are to learn. Students in this study often pointed out the advantages and opportunities for civic engagement that their institution provided; these experiences served as an entry point for further civic growth and development.

This three-fold impact on student civic engagement is an interesting parallel to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Psychosocial Theory of Student Development for traditional-aged college students. Providing diverse opportunities to be civically involved allowed students

to build competencies and new skills in civic engagement, similar to the first vector of psychosocial development in which students are looking for ways to be involved and learn new competencies and skills. As new skills and challenges emerged from their experiences, students in this study discussed how their viewpoints had evolved to a more critical understanding of civic engagement and an increased understanding of civic values and beliefs. This increased understanding of self is similar to the later vectors of development in which students are becoming more aware of their personal and interpersonal abilities and are beginning to act within this understanding, leading to a more congruent connection to meaningful commitments and purpose. Likewise, as my participants increased their understanding of self and how to be civically engaged in meaningful ways, their sense of effectiveness increased.

This sense of effectiveness and meaningful engagement parallels the final vector of psychosocial development that Chickering and Reisser (1993) described as the point where students have developed congruence among their values, beliefs, and actions and are better able to balance self-interest with a sense of social responsibility. Similarly, through civic opportunities and experiences provided by their university, students in this study discovered more about their passions, understanding, and civic skills, which led to more meaningful civic engagement and subsequently a greater sense of effectiveness. As one participant described:

I think that what my university has really done for me is help me figure out how to best use my time and abilities and apply them to whatever issue that I'm working on. I think that I can say that my university has helped me out a lot in that aspect. Just helping me figure out who I am. And figure out what strengths and weaknesses I have. Figuring out how best I can apply them civically. And work with a group and work with a team. It's really helped me figure all of that out.

Moreover, it appears from this study that Chickering and Reisser's theory is helpful for better understanding how traditional-aged college students in this study connect the development of

their civic engagement to their institutional experiences during a developmentally significant time in their lives.

Through institutional culture (i.e. curricular and co-curricular experiences, programs, events, and relationships), students in this study shared how their civic engagement experiences, understanding (learning), and sense of effectiveness (development) were positively impacted. This study's exploration of the positive impact that institutional culture has had on student civic engagement adds to the growing body of research on how colleges impact student development and learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

University as My Community

Participants shared how viewing the university as their community partially guided their civic engagement. This theme emerged from students' descriptions of their connection to and investment in the university as it related to their civic development. Students envisioned that their civic engagement involved how they engaged in and advocated for change on campus. Students in this study were highly involved and committed to improving the university in different ways. Students expressed attitudes and engaged in behaviors comparable to those of civically engaged citizens in local communities. For example, students advocated for underrepresented campus groups, challenged systems of perceived injustice, and served as ambassadors or spokespeople on behalf of the university. Others described how the amount of time and ways in which they invested in the relationship with their university gave them a sense of belonging to a community. This finding challenges higher educators' viewpoints on civic engagement in the local, national, and global community. The phrases "my community" and "my university" are evidently synonymous to participants. Students in this study described how the

university acts as a community where students can learn to practice civic engagement on campus.

Strange and Banning (2001) created a model of community membership through learning environments that provides helpful insight in understanding how students in this study see their civic engagement as an expression of their membership in the university community. The hierarchical model is built upon three stages:

Level (1)-Students feel safe and a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to their learning environment (university);

Level (2)-Involvement: When students feel that they belong and are part of the community, they become more involved in activities and opportunities on campus;

Level (3)-Community: With a strong sense of belonging and increased involvement, students feel that they are full members in the university community.

Though this model was not created specifically for understand how students see their university as a place for civic engagement, the messages of membership and community speak to why students in this study viewed themselves as community members. All students in this study, as stated earlier, were highly engaged and involved civically, socially, and academically. It makes sense then that these students, according to Strange and Banning's model, would view their university as the primary community where they engage civically.

This theme was a surprise to me and led to my own paradigm shift. I did not initially view the university as a community for civic engagement to the degree that students do in this study. This finding added weight and depth to understanding the positive and negative messages students perceived about civic engagement. It also suggests a unique opportunity for educators to focus on increasing student involvement in university life to expand students' civic capacities

beyond traditional student government opportunities. As well, it leads educators to reconsider how civically engaged students may feel when they are excluded from university processes.

Positive Messages

Discussion of places for civic engagement on campus highlighted the importance of physical and constructed environments. Strange and Banning (2001) described how buildings, centers, and symbols on campus can convey messages to institutional members. For students in this study, the plaza served as a gathering place to participate in and witness civic engagement in action, which promoted a positive message of support for civic engagement. The stage, for example, was symbolic for participants as a platform provided by the university to encourage students to voice and promote civic concerns through rallies and debates. Buildings and centers also served as places for students to plan and participate in civic engagement and symbolically represented institutional support. Fliers, banners, street paintings, and other forms of civic engagement related information posted on campus also contributed to the physical environment of civic engagement. Students' interpretations and impressions of these visual reminders on campus created a sense of the importance of civic awareness. Seeing information on campus regarding causes, fundraisers, and service organizations, for example, was a source of encouragement and inspiration for students and represented a positive message for civic engagement.

Students in this study reflected on the significance of supportive relationships with members of the institution. These relationships fostered a positive message for student civic engagement. Human relationships are a dimension of campus environments that reflect elements of culture (Strange & Banning, 2001), as evidenced by the ways students in this study described the importance of relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Students spoke of their faculty or

staff advisors as sources of inspiration and influence in shaping and developing their civic development and giving them the courage to press on and become advocates for change. The importance of faculty and staff relationships and the influence they can have in inspiring student learning and development is well documented (Light, 2001; Kuh, et al., 2005). The power of even one significant mentoring relationship with a faculty or staff member goes a long way, according to students in this study, in giving the impression that SEU supports civic engagement.

Student peers are members of the institution and likewise contribute to the culture of the institution. Having like-minded peers and groups of students committed to civic engagement was also a source of hope and inspiration for my participants. The community that students developed through civic engagement organizations provided them with much needed accountability and encouragement to continue in their civic endeavors. Astin's (1993) research on the importance of peer influence on student involvement is affirmed as students in this study often cited the significance of upperclassmen mentors and peers influencing their own initial civic involvement in college.

Negative Messages

The theme of institutional neglect took on the forms of exclusion of student voice in university policies and procedures, lack of sufficient support for civic related programs, neglect of diversity integration, and lack of student-friendly systems for civic involvement. These identified forms reflect ways that students in this study felt that their voices had been neglected, resulting in a negative message about civic engagement. Sanford (1967) described how the optimal learning environment in college occurs when there is an appropriate balance of challenge and support for students. My participants' collective cry of institutional neglect, in my opinion, reflects an imbalance of challenge and support that Sanford suggested causes students to struggle

with their development and learning. Moreover, students in this study described these forms of neglect as issues that distracted and discouraged them from their focus on civic development and engagement. It should be noted that students in this study did not expect the institution to provide for their every civic need and desire; on the contrary, students described ways to optimize student civic engagement by simple methods. For example, through the senior administration including students in university processes, administrative attendance at student civic events, and providing more meeting spaces and systems for involvement, these changes can more appropriately balance the challenge and support of student civic engagement.

Schlossberg's theory of Mattering and Marginality (1989) may also help explain at some level what students in this study felt when they did not sense the administration's support for students. This may have been best highlighted in my participants' descriptions of the gap and disconnect they perceived between the senior administration and students that often led to a sense of "us versus them" and added to their belief that the student voice was not important. Schlossberg's work revealed that when students feel marginalized by their university community, students tend to spend more time focusing on ways to fit in and matter rather than focusing on learning and development. This feeling of marginalization was felt at times by students of color in this study due to the lack of adequate diversity integration inside and outside the classroom and/or the lack of institutional responses to discrimination on and off campus. Furthermore, the neglect of campus-wide diversity initiatives such as social justice forums and diversity training workshops was identified by several participants as a missed opportunity to positively impact student civic engagement. Recent studies on campus diversity initiatives have shown positive impact on student civic engagement (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Hurtado, Engberg, & Ponjuan, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)

Though all students in this study were highly civically engaged and involved within their university community, all participants had encountered situations in which they felt marginalized in their civic pursuits by different forms of institutional neglect. These forms of institutional neglect engendered unnecessary discouragement and distraction from participants' focus on their civic endeavors and generated a sense that student civic engagement was not strongly endorsed by their institution.

Mixed Messages

Large, research institutions are complex environments with competing values and voices and different individuals, departments, and organizations, all of which contribute to the unique nature of an institutional culture. Some of these institutional voices, according to my participants, communicated mixed or conflicting messages concerning civic engagement. The pursuit of institutional prestige over civic engagement highlights the concerns in civic reform literature that institutions emphasize research and scholarship, as students in this study perceived, over their civic mission.

Students also pointed out how they saw the pursuit of prestige exhibited through their interactions with faculty. Though students reported that some faculty were civically engaged, most students felt that faculty in general were narrowly focused on their own disciplines and more concerned with publications and grants than service-learning and other civic engagement opportunities. This perception of faculty is reflective in part of the struggles that advocates of civic education and service-learning have long had in their efforts to increase faculty involvement and buy-in, as reflected in the Ivory Tower phenomenon and issues of disciplinary ethnocentrism (Harkavy, 2004). Disciplinary ethnocentrism, according to Harkavy, can work strongly against the civic mission of institutions by communicating that the pursuit of self-

interest is more important than civic values. His findings are similar to how my participants perceived civic engagement to be in the background and the pursuit of prestige to be at the forefront of institutional priorities and values.

The mixed message of student consumption reflects issues in recent reform literature concerned with the “McDonaldization” of universities, where students are viewed as customers to be served rather than contributors to the learning environment (Ritzer, 2002). Participants in this study described student consumption as a sense of individualism and personal achievement, which further translated into consumer behaviors in both the social and academic realms. These behaviors were perceived by my participants as contrary to the practice of stewardship and civic engagement. This finding speaks to the concerns of many education reformers who believe that universities are becoming too commercialized. The messages of individualism are evident on campuses today as the commercialization of higher education; including corporate sponsorships of athletic programs, faculty and student research, and branding on Web sites and other forms of advertisement; have become more common (Bok, 2003). These commercial, business, and service models on campus may be cost-effective, but as Bok and other educational reformers caution, they can reinforce a message of student consumption and self-interest (Colby, et al., 2003).

Lastly, the invisible nature of civic engagement on campus as described by my participants is also reflective of the competing values of a large, research institution. The lack of evident signs of civic engagement through non-student promotion, institutional literature, understanding of the civic landmarks on campus, and intentional recognition and celebration of civic engagement represented a conflicting message about the level of importance placed on civic engagement by the institution. The invisibility of civic engagement is a theme echoed in the

few related studies that exist on institutional culture and civic engagement; these studies emphasize the importance of campus artifacts, rituals, events, symbols and traditions that remind students of their civic responsibilities (Colby et al., 2003; Thornton & Jeager, 2006). Moreover, the invisibility of civic engagement in this study perhaps stemmed from my participants' perception that civic engagement was not a shared value and lived philosophy across all institutional members. Colby et al. (2003) found that shared values and lived philosophies regarding civic engagement are an essential components of institutions believed to be successfully focused on civic and moral responsibility.

Student Voice and Vision

The students' vision for institutional integration of civic engagement is reflective of Boyer's (1987; 1994) seminal vision of the scholarship of engagement. Boyer called for institutions to move beyond knowledge and competencies into the application and engagement of learning that evokes personal, moral, and civic development. Likewise, students in this study believed that having a greater emphasis on civic engagement inside and outside the classroom and providing opportunities to work alongside other institutional members are components of a campus culture that promotes student civic engagement. This vision also complements the vision of an engaged campus as described by students in the recent "Raise Your Voice" (RYV) national campaign for student civic engagement. RYV's vision advocates for a "sense of commitment and purpose among students, as well as among administrators, staff, and faculty. Students find ways to contribute to the public good that they enjoy and find fulfilling and that often intersect with their course of study. There is constant activity around campus as students and others work on service projects, advocacy campaigns, and community based research" (Raill & Hollander, 2006, p. 1)

Inviting students to share their vision of a campus culture that enhanced student civic engagement afforded me further insight into my participants' perceptions of the impact of culture and messages about civic engagement. The activity also answered a call from literature to hear and learn more from the student point of view as related to institutional culture and civic engagement (Thornton & Jeager, 2006; Vogelsang & Astin, 2005). The theme of greater institutional integration of civic engagement is I believe in response to the perceived forms of institutional neglect and mixed messages. The integration of service-learning into all general education courses, for example, speaks to students' desires to see a greater campus-wide emphasis on civic engagement. Furthermore, the idea of collaboration and centralization of all civic engagement organizations and resources is a response to the present sense of the decentralization of civic engagement on campus and the need to have a more distinct and student-friendly system in place for civic involvement. Moreover, the desire for greater integration of civic engagement into welcome week programs and campus-wide traditions and events stems from the present lack of visible, tangible campus artifacts that reflect the importance of student civic engagement.

The vision of a greater emphasis on institutional engagement, specifically the desire for senior administrators and faculty to interact with students in different forms of civic engagement and the importance of the president's role in modeling civic engagement, is a response to the perceived lack of sufficient support and buy-in from all institutional members. The need for a greater emphasis on institutional engagement is also, I believe, testament to how powerful these interactions can be in fostering student civic engagement, as many participants had been positively impacted by their own supportive relationships with faculty and staff.

Introduction to Implications

The focus of this study was an extensive investigation at a large, research-extensive institution. Implications for practice are focused on how senior administrators, faculty, and student affairs educators can infuse stronger messages of civic engagement into a large university setting. I have decided to provide recommendations that I believe are important and practical for improving a campus culture and environment of civic engagement. These recommendations include my own voice but are also grounded in this study's findings on impact, perceived messages, and student vision.

Centralize Civic Engagement

Centralizing all civic related organizations and resources gives a sense of focus and emphasis to civic engagement, especially at large, research institutions where there are numerous competing organizations that often function in silos. Rather than having service organizations and opportunities spread all over campus, creating a center or a hub for all civic related activities in the heart of campus (i.e. the Student Center) will help students understand all the opportunities for civic involvement, how to get involved, and most importantly, convey a message that civic engagement is something that is valued and easily accessed. If it is not possible to physically create one single center, it is certainly feasible to create a centralized Web site directing students to opportunities and resources based upon their own civic interests and skills. Centralized places in the heart of campus (such as plazas or freedom of speech zones for students and other members of the institution to rally, debate, and advocate for social causes) convey a physical and symbolic message that civic engagement is a central focus of campus life.

Encouraging collaboration among like-minded student organizations who value service and civic engagement can also provide a more centralized focus on civic engagement as students

in groups come together to promote civic engagement. Institutions should continue to offer diverse ways to become civically involved as this is a strength of larger campuses; however, to combat the potential turf battles among student organizations, student affairs staff should encourage annual partnerships during which organizations come together to develop civic traditions and events or work together on a community project. This spirit of collaboration should also translate to staff and administrators who have organizational oversight of co-curricular civic involvement and the service-learning curriculum. These individuals should work together by sharing resources and supporting one another's efforts both inside and outside the classroom. Lastly, centralizing service-learning through general education courses exposes more students to a powerful mode of civic engagement and provides another centralized message that the institution is in support of student civic engagement.

Visualize Civic Engagement

Seeing really is believing; this is especially true for the ways individuals, such as college students, interpret what is important to a campus culture. There are simple yet effective strategies to implement visible artifacts and traditions at a large university that enhance the visibility of civic engagement. Again, because of the competing voices and values on a diverse and large campus, the messages of civic engagement need to be evident. Implementing service day traditions during which all campus members are involved with some form of civic engagement on or off campus provides a venue for seeing civic engagement in action at all levels. Likewise, providing places such as stages, plazas, and centers that allow students to learn, engage, and witness civic engagement in action is crucial to increasing visibility. Providing additional spaces for flyers, banners, or posters for promotion of civic engagement are passive yet powerful visual reminders encouraging civic awareness and involvement.

Hosting semester forums on civic issues, volunteer fairs, and monthly rallies or debates in the heart of campus are important initiatives that bring civic engagement out of the shadows and into the light of campus life. Creating or resurrecting civic values in university landmarks, statues, or other symbols can also convey civic engagement messages visually and symbolically. A commitment by the senior administration, especially the president, to attend a few student civic events or participate in community service projects alongside students is a simple yet powerful way to draw positive energy and attention to civic engagement. A once-a-semester “Serve with the President Day” is again a simple yet powerful tradition at a large institution during which students have an opportunity to “roll up their sleeves,” as a couple of participants in my study put it, with their president. Lastly, staff, faculty, and administrators’ recognition of civic engagement through celebrations, award ceremonies, and or speeches also provides a visible message that brings the civic mission to life.

Mobilize (Empower) Civic Engagement

It is not uncommon for welcome week programs to exist on campuses. Most welcome week experiences serve to assimilate students to the values and traditions of the university and empower students to get involved. The welcome week experience in many ways serves an entry point, a tradition that conveys institutional messages early on to incoming students about what is important to the university. Utilizing the structure of a welcome week experience, administrators and educators could design a day out of this week that reflects the importance of student civic engagement. The importance of early civic involvement, especially at large universities, is critical to mobilizing and empowering students for long-term civic engagement. The welcome week program is an excellent venue for introducing students early on to various student service-related organizations and resources as well as connecting them to staff, student leaders, and

faculty who support civic engagement and can further shape student experiences. Moreover, connecting students to the organizational systems for civic involvement reduces the likelihood of first-year students missing out on involvement and leadership opportunities in student service-related organizations. The idea of a day focused on civic engagement during which students are introduced to civic engagement; listen to the president, faculty, and staff share why civic engagement is important; and do community service projects in small groups with student leaders, staff, and faculty sets the tone early that graduating engaged citizens is an important part of the mission of the institution.

The vision of a welcome week civic engagement day is not only important for empowering students who are coming into college already civically engaged but can also serve as an outreach tool to mobilize students who may not otherwise become involved during college. This decreases the likelihood of only the highly engaged (pre-college) students doing all the work. Following the traditional models of welcome week small group structures that are led by upperclassmen and staff affords incoming students opportunities to establish powerful, supportive relationships with members of the institution who can further reinforce the message that civic engagement is important. Furthermore, having a small group of peers and other institutional members who bond together through community service or other civic related projects provides a greater sense of connection to the university community, which students in this study said is an important component of their civic development in college. Finally, the welcome week structure is also a perfect venue for introducing new civic traditions, events, and rituals that empower and mobilize students for civic engagement.

Limitations

Though great efforts were made to increase the trustworthiness of the findings and interpretations of this study, there are nonetheless limitations. First, this study was conducted at one institution. The study is focused on the idiosyncrasies of a particular institution's culture and its impact on student civic engagement, which prevents its generalizability to other institutions. Though it is not the goal of qualitative research to generalize to the greater population (Merriam, 2002), my use of multiple sources of data (extensive individual interviews, photo-elicitation assignment, and focus groups) and the collection of rich, descriptive data has increased the likelihood of readers finding application and meaning (Merriam, 1995). It is also important to remember that the focus of this study is on traditional-aged undergraduate students, while the majority of college students today are considered non-traditional. Though the rationale, questions, and scope of this study are fitting for this specific population, it should be noted when considering its application.

Attempts were made to recruit participants with diverse backgrounds and different expressions of student civic engagement represented on campus; however, it should be noted that I did not have an active student government member as a participant in my study, although I had participants who were previously members. I think this absence resulted in a missing viewpoint that would have given a different perspective from the others in the study who held mainly negative views about the validity and purpose of the Student Government Association at this particular institution. It should also be noted that because I asked students to reflect on abstract and highly reflective concepts such as culture and civic development, it was a challenge at times to incorporate student-friendly language and provide examples that stimulated thought. Although I piloted my questions with a few students beforehand, conducting a series of pilot sessions

would have allowed me more opportunities to work out further some of the kinks in language and given me a stronger starting point with my participants.

Finally, institutional culture is complex and layered (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Although the investigation in this study was extensive and engendered an enormous amount of data, it is important to remember that there are likely more layers that could have been uncovered in this study. This study is only the tip of the iceberg in considering ways to investigate how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement.

Future Suggestions for Research

The surprise twist in my study that I share briefly in the following chapter relates to the importance of observation in cultural studies. For me, witnessing first-hand the environments and cultures on campus brought to life what students described in their interviews, similar to the ways photo-elicitation did for the second interviews. I was only able to observe a couple of environments toward the completion of the data collection; however, these few observations provided a greater understanding of the meaning-making processes participants exhibited in the interviews. Incorporating more ethnographic techniques through which researchers can collect data through the lived experiences of the participants would add greater depth to the data collected verbally.

The use of photo-elicitation was a powerful tool that allowed a glimpse into the constructed environment and perceived messages that often go undetected unless there is an opportunity to reflect on them. The photo-elicitation assignment brought to the surface cultural considerations for all participants that they often admitted would have gone unrecognized otherwise. I strongly encourage the continued use of this technique in future studies and the use of an accompanying journal to assist with further reflection. Though my focus was on student civic engagement, studies that incorporate the viewpoints

and perceptions of educators and staff who work closely with student civic organizations may also provide further insight into the environments and cultures that impact student civic engagement.

In addition, photographs are considered documents that can be counted, organized, and sorted into categories (representative of themes from interviews) and displayed visually in a table with descriptive reports (percentages and counts), thereby representing another way to report the findings. This type of document analysis has been conducted recently through a study in which descriptive accounts of pictures were presented alongside identified themes to further highlight the findings (Loeffler, 2004).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the findings and how they relate to student development theory and the few studies that exist on institutional culture and student civic engagement. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work on psychosocial development of college students is informative in understanding the developmental components of the three-fold institutional impact on my participants' civic development. The surprise finding of the "university as my community" theme further supports providing opportunities for civic engagement on campus.

The positive messages of civic engagement reflect the importance of the physical and symbolic presence of civic engagement and the importance of supportive relationships. Sanford's (1967) theory of challenge and support is helpful in understanding why students felt neglected by not being included in university processes and other forms of neglect. The mixed messages students perceived about civic engagement reflect the growing concerns about institutional prestige, commercialism, and self-interests described in reform literature. Lastly, students shared

a vision of institutional integration and engagement that has rich implications for centralizing, visualizing, and mobilizing student civic engagement on campus.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS: A FOLLOW-UP CHAPTER

Introduction

The constructivist researcher embraces the reality that there are multiple forms of meaning, acknowledges the his or her own biases and assumptions, and engages in a reflective awareness of how the researcher's voice and experiences evolve alongside his or her participants. As I developed relationships with my participants through interviews and informal conversations, I was invited into their world, their experiences, and the culture of their institution as they saw it, described it, and encountered it. Part of qualitative research is the willingness of the researcher to be flexible and adapt to the emerging relationships and content as the study unfolds. My opportunity to be flexible came in the form of an unanticipated invitation by some of my participants to experience what I had only listened to and documented in words thus far. I was asked to attend two different events on campus that promoted student civic engagement.

In the spirit of this study, I decided not only to attend and observe but to do my own photo-elicitation of what I witnessed. These personal experiences gave me a richer understanding of the emerging themes in this study. In fact, what students found meaningful in their institutional culture as related to civic engagement became much more palpable and alive to me when I witnessed the experiences and events first-hand. Moreover, as I shared in the section on limitations of this study, these experiences helped me realized that I would have likely gained even greater insight by observing more student experiences on and off campus. I am grateful, however, for the two unique observation experiences as I believe they added to the richness of

this research. The rest of this brief follow-up chapter highlights my observations and photographs taken in this surprise portion of my study.

Step-Up

The first event I attended was the Step-Up Benefit Concert. The purpose of this event was to bring all student service and civic-related organizations together to promote a unified message of student civic engagement, to encourage a collective partnership to address local poverty initiatives, and to encourage students to find civic organizations through which they can utilize their unique skills and talents (see Figure 23). Experiencing this event personally brought to life the vision that students talked about in centralizing civic engagement. In particular, I thought having student organizations from all over campus set up tables and booths for information sharing and involvement was a depiction of the hub or centralizing concept that students described in the study. I, too, believe centralization is an important strategy for campuses to enhance student civic engagement (see Figure 24).



Figure 23. "What's your passion?"

This sign among many was at the entrance to the event. Students who came were ushered to a table to share their talents and skills and be directed to any number of civic organizations to discuss involvement. This centralized concept inviting students to "step up" in their civic engagement was a part of the all day benefit concert for ending poverty in the local community...I talked to a couple of students about the vision for this event. They hope it becomes an annual tradition and event that serves to connect students to all the opportunities to become civically engaged...powerful.

-Researcher Journal



Figure 24. Centralization of student civic organizations

I'm impressed seeing how students from Young Democrats, to Invisible Children, to College Republicans, and several other student civic organizations were willing to come together to help students find their niche civically, as well as support a centralized, collaborative effort to support a local initiative to end poverty...in fact, I overheard one student say that he had registered over 30 students today to vote.

-Researcher Journal

The final picture I documented reminded me of the sense of efficacy and the belief of students in my study had that they could make a difference in their civic endeavors. Posted at the front of the stage was a banner that to me represented the general spirit of this campus-wide event to promote civic engagement and a call to action (see Figure 25).



Figure 25. “Be the change...”

It’s refreshing to see students calling one another to action...this reflects to me what students were talking about in this study the need to hold each other accountable, to be responsible for another’s actions. Seeing this quote here and other places at this event reminds me of the importance that educators and institutions have in instilling this sense of belief and hope that students can make a difference.

-Researcher Journal

In closing my time at the Step-Up event, I wondered what it would have been like to see an administrator, a couple of faculty members, or even if the president or a senior administrator drop by and briefly show their support. What a simple yet powerful gesture of support for student civic engagement it would have been if other members of the institution could have attended even if for only a short while. After being told that no administrators or faculty had attended the half-day event, quickly one of the student event leaders said to me how exciting it

was that two administrative units on campus provided the funding needed to arrange the event. In pressing further on why this was important, these students said it gave them a sense of hope that the university cared about their civic engagement.

Living Wage Rally

The second event I attended was on campus at the plaza where students can hold rallies and advocate for social causes and involvement. This rally was centered on supporting living wages for all campus employees. This experience gave me a greater understanding of what students meant by the university being a community where they can be civically engaged, as this event challenged the university to take care of its employees. One student in particular got up on stage and shared how she felt it was the responsibility of students as members of the institution to advocate for employees who may feel they do not have a voice.

The event was also a glimpse of the vision of institutional engagement that students described in the study, as there were students, faculty, staff, and local community members who participated in the rally (see Figure 26) and subsequent march across campus (see Figure 27). Lastly, the importance of place, especially a place that is in the center of campus to expose students to civic engagement, came to life for me as the energy and visual representation of civic engagement in action was contagious and definitely felt on campus that day.



Figure 26. Institutional engagement

So encouraging to see staff, faculty, and students coming together to rally for support of a living wage for all campus employees. Having the plaza for rallies in the heart of campus gives out such a great, positive message for civic engagement...there's great energy in this environment...who wouldn't want to join in?

-Researcher Journal



Figure 27. Living wage march across campus (after the rally)

As I concluded my observation by watching the line form for the march across campus, I too felt a sense of hope that universities of all sizes, including large, research-extensive universities, can with some intentionality and focus become places that encourage student civic engagement. Moreover, as this march set out across campus, I wrote in my journal the following: “Students, faculty, staff, and community members together standing up for human dignity and the fair treatment of all persons...I have a greater sense and belief that universities can do what they have espoused all along...to graduate engaged citizens.”

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APPENDIX A

Participant Email Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Exploring Institutional Culture and Student Civic Engagement: A Constructivist Inquiry* conducted by Joel H. Scott from the Department of Counseling and Human Development and Student Affairs Administration at the South East University. Because of your commitment to civic engagement related activities, you have been highly recommended by peers and university staff to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore how institutional (college) culture impacts student civic engagement through the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of civically engaged students at South East University. I hope this study will contribute to the lack of information in literature on the student perspective. While it is widely known that colleges do impact student learning and development, less is known how colleges impact student civic engagement. Civic engagement has resurged as an important issue in higher education over the past several years, as we see a greater need to graduate college students who value the local, national, and global concerns of our society. I believe this research will provide insights from students on how to better create environments and cultures on campus that influence student civic engagement.

Activities for this project include participating in two 60-90 minute interviews with me beginning in early February. The first interview will focus on the degree to which you believe your civic values have been impacted by your experiences at SEU. Building upon the first interview, I will ask you to take pictures of different ways that SEU has impacted your civic engagement in preparation for the second interview, which will be conducted as a focus group

with a few other participants. I will provide you with a disposable camera and during the second interview we will discuss the pictures you have taken. If you complete both interview sessions, I will give you a \$10.00 gift card to Amazon.com as thanks for your time and your contributions to this study. The total time commitment for this study is expected to be three to five hours.

Your experiences as a student and perspectives on how your institution has impacted your civic engagement can make solid contributions to the literature on student civic engagement. Please join me in this exciting opportunity to provide valuable information for educators committed to the civic development of college students. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at jhscott@seu.edu or at (706) 424-1082. I hope to hear from you soon!

Truly,

Joel H. Scott
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling and Human Development
Student Affairs Administration

APPENDIX B

Individual Interview Protocol

Exploring Institutional Culture and Student Civic Engagement

The purpose of this study is to explore how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement.

Preliminary Questions:

Share Erlich's definition: "civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities (local or global) and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference."

1. How do you describe civic engagement? What does it mean to you?
2. Tell me about some of your present civic engagement activities/involvement.

Probe: How did you come to get involved in these activities?

RQ 1: How does institutional culture impact student civic engagement?

1. Has your definition of civic engagement changed since attending SEU? Please explain.
2. If you had to rank yourself 1-10...1-being little or no civic engagement and 10 being very involved in civic engagement before college and now, what would you rank yourself and why?

Probe: Were you involved in civically before college? To what degree, if at all, do you believe that has influenced the development of your civic engagement since coming to SEU?

3. In what ways, if any, has SEU influenced/enhanced your civic engagement?

4. In what ways, if any, has SEU deterred your civic engagement?

Further Possible Probes:

Physical: Is there anything in the physical environment of SEU...signs, institutional literature, location, events, ceremonies, etc. that has enhanced or deterred your civic engagement?

Human Aggregate: In your immediate peer group, is your involvement in civic engagement more/less/or about the same as your peers?

Probe: Does their involvement or lack of involvement have any influence on your civic engagement?

Probe: Can you speak to any faculty or staff relationships/mentorships that may have enhanced or deterred your civic engagement?

Symbolism/Constructed: Is there anything at SEU that symbolically reminds you of the value/importance of civic engagement?

RQ 2: What messages, if any, do student perceive from their institution about civic engagement?

1. Is student civic engagement valued by SEU? How do you know? How is this communicated?

Probe: What do university representatives of SEU (faculty, staff, senior administration) have to say about civic engagement?

2. In what ways, if any, does SEU (administration, faculty, staff) send mixed or conflicting messages about the importance of student civic engagement? (Ex of mixed message: administration says the students are highly valued, but the student center is in bad shape, too small, etc.)

Probe: Any policies? Any practices? Any traditions?

3. In what ways, if any, does the student culture (student population as a whole) at SEU communicate mixed messages about civic engagement?

RQ 3: How would students describe a campus culture that is truly enhancing student civic engagement?

1. If you could design a college environment / culture that would positively impact student civic engagement, what would it look like....what would be going on?

2. The students as a whole represent a part of the institutional culture, what roles do you believe the student culture has in enhancing student civic engagement?

3. If senior administration at SEU asked you to identify the major issues that your institution (large, research extensive land-grant institution) need to address in order to enhance student civic engagement, what would they be?

Concluding questions:

1. When you think about life after graduation, what kind of commitments do you believe you'll make to remain civically engaged?

Probe: How much of this, if any, do you attribute to your time at SEU? (RQ 1)

2. What would your civic engagement look like now had you not attended SEU? (RQ 1)

APPENDIX C

Photo-elicitation Assignment

Exploring Institutional Culture and Student Civic Engagement Photo Elicitation Interview (Focus Group)

For this part of the study you are asked to take photographs based upon the following prompt:

After our discussion on institutional culture and civic engagement during the first interview session, *please take 10-15 pictures of the different messages you perceive about civic engagement at South East University*. These messages could represent different types of institutional messages—positive, negative, or mixed/conflicting messages. This is a very open-ended assignment. What is important is what you perceive and how you make meaning of these different messages.

The next interview session we will spend time exploring why you took these pictures and what they mean to you as you reflect on your experiences at SEU and how it relates to your civic engagement. This session will be conducted with a few other participants as a focus group. An advantage of focus groups is the opportunity to hear from other student perspectives as you share your experiences.

Please note that you should not take photographs that can identify others (faces or name tags on doors, etc.) as this will decrease your confidentiality. If you choose to take a picture of an individual or group of people, please make sure that faces are hidden in the picture.

Along with the disposable camera, I'm providing you with a journal to note: (a) brief description of picture (b) where it is located, and (c) why you took the picture/what it means to you. Please bring this journal with you to the next interview. It will serve as a helpful resource as you describe your pictures, and will be a recorded document in case your pictures do not develop.

Please note the date below to drop your camera off. The drop-off box will be in the Center for Leadership & Service. I will develop the pictures and bring them to the focus group interview. **I will be contacting you as a friendly reminder the day you should drop the camera off.**

If you have any questions or have problems with your disposable camera, please do not hesitate to contact me at jhscott@uga.edu or at (706) 424-1082.

**Date/Time/Location-
Focus Group Interview**

**Date to drop off
Camera**

REMINDER: Please bring your journal with you!

If something comes up and you are unable to attend this interview, please contact me as soon as possible at jhscott@seu.edu or (706) 424-1082 to reschedule.

APPENDIX D

Consent to Participate

I, _____, agree to take part in a research study titled “Exploring Institutional Culture and Student Civic Engagement: A Constructivist Inquiry” which is being conducted by Joel H. Scott from the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia (542-3564) under the direction of Dr. Diane Cooper, Department of Counseling and Human Development, University of Georgia (542-1812). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participation without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to explore how institutional culture impacts student civic engagement.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in two audio-taped 60-90 minute interviews (one individual; one focus group)
- 2) In preparation for the second interview, take pictures with a disposable camera or personal digital camera (if you own one and willing to use) of institutional messages about civic engagement. This type of interview is called a “photo elicitation interview” and will be conducted in small focus groups with other participants
- 3) Give consent for photographs to be published in the findings or appendix of the research report
- 4) Review your own interview transcription, known as “member checking” to increase rigor and accuracy of data
- 5) The researcher may call me to follow up or clarify information from the interview

Interviews will be conducted in a neutral location or location preferred by the participants.

Upon completion of the two interview sessions, participants will be given a \$10.00 gift card to Amazon.com.

No risks are expected.

I understand that efforts to ensure confidentiality will include the use of pseudonyms during interviews and data transcription. Data will be reported in aggregate form to reduce the probability of identifying a participant.

I understand that information such as gender, age, years in school, ethnicity, major of study, and types of civic involvement will be included in the findings for demographic and participant validity purposes. All documents provided by applicants will be kept in locked cabinet, accessible only by the researcher. All audio-tapes will be destroyed after a period of time appropriate for data analysis, not to exceed one year.

I understand that the researcher will employ peers to review interview transcriptions to validate researcher’s findings. Peers will not have access to any identifiable information.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at **(706) 424-1082**.

My signature below indicates that I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Email:_____

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies; one for your records and one for the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706)542-3199; Email Address IRB@uga.edu

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<i>Name (Pseudonym)</i>	<i>Degree of Study</i>	<i>Gender/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Years at SEU</i>	<i>Age</i>
Keisha	Social Work/Child & Family Development	Female/African American	4 th year	22
Margaret	Political Science/ Speech Communications	Female/Caucasian	3rd year	20
Phil	Sociology	Male/Caucasian	2 nd year (transferred)	21
Maria	International Affairs/Latin American & Caribbean Studies	Female/Latino(a)	3 rd year	20
Robert	Landscape Architecture	Male/Caucasian	5 th year	23
Laura	Religion	Female/Caucasian	2 nd year	20
Roger	Psychology	Male/Asian American	4 th year	22
Mabel	Social Work	Female/Caucasian	3 rd year	20
Art	History/Pre-law	Male/Caucasian	4 th year	22
Nicole	Public Relations/Speech Communication	Female/African American	2 nd year	20
Thomas	Biology/Pre-Med	Male/Caucasian	4 th year	22
Anna	Psychology	Female/Caucasian	4 th year	21

Table 2

Participant Involvement (Civic Engagement Activities)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Present Types of Civic Engagement</i>	<i>Hours/Week</i>
Keisha	Leadership in University Chapter of NAACP; LGBT Board Member	20+ hours
Margaret	Chair, College Republicans; Alternative Spring Break Site Leader; President, (Service Sorority)	20 hours
Phil	President, Volunteer SEU; One Campaign Coordinator (Local Initiative to Resolve Poverty)	11-15 hours
Maria	Tutor, Oasis Catolico; Mentor, LISTO program; Member of Young Democrats; External Relations Chair, Lambda Theta Alpha; State Association of Latino Elected Officials	11-15 hours
Robert	University Ambassador; Committee Member, Dance Marathon; Co-Leader, Wesley Foundation Mission Trip; Leadership Team Member, Wesley Foundation	11-15 hours
Laura	Co-President, Invisible Children; Member, One Athens Teen Pregnancy Prevention; Chair, Step-Up Leadership Team	11-15 hours
Roger	University Ambassador; Big Brother; Alternative Spring Break Site Leader; Chair, (non-profit service fraternity); Volunteer, Boys & Girls Club	6-10 hours
Mabel	Chair, Forever Young Campaign (mentor program); Alternative Spring Break Site Leader; Campus Coordinator, Teach For America; Habitat for Humanity Volunteer	6-10 hours
Art	Member of Young Democrats; Vice President, Habitat for Humanity; Director, Case Administration for University Judiciary; Director of Resources, Lambda Alliance; Intern, AIDS Athens	11-15 hours
Nicole	Volunteer, Teen Challenge; PR Chair, Black Affairs Council; Moderator, National Issues Forum (NIF); Honors Ambassador; Apprentice for Undergraduate Research focused on civic initiatives	6-10 hours
Thomas	University Judiciary; University Ambassador	6-10 hours
Anna	Gymnastic Coach, County Special Olympics; Volunteer teacher, Project Focus (science program); Bereavement Counselor, Hospice; Alternative Spring Break Site Leader	6-10 hours