

Differences Community Service and Political Perceptions: Urban and Suburban Campuses

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Introduction

The focus of this study is on how undergraduate students from urban and suburban campuses engage and perceive civic engagement. Researchers collected data from a short, modified survey called the Community Service Attitudes Scale. Data was collected from undergraduate students in one mid-sized institution in an urban area and one institution in a suburban area. The researchers analyzed data specifically looking at college student's attitudes towards community service and political engagement.

Research Questions

RQ1 What are the differences between suburban and urban students in how they participate with civic engagement?

RQ2 Do participants that post about politics on Twitter or Facebook register to vote?

Definitions

For the purpose of research, urban college students will be defined as students who go to institutions located in a city (PAQ, 2016). Suburban college students are students that attend university in large towns or residential areas (PAQ, 2016). "Civic Engagement is democratic participation, citizenship, community engagement, tend to be conflated with campus programs and initiatives that fall under the headings of "community-based learning" and "service-learning," (Finley, 2011). Civic engagement is both community service and political engagement. Civic duty is the duties of citizenship are the things we must do like voting, being informed about candidates, taking part of in government helping your community, respecting and protecting others rights (Eskridge, 2001). Community service will be defined as "a service that is performed for the benefit of the public or its intuitions," (Vocabulary.com, 2018). "Political engagement is can be loosely defined as citizens' activities affecting politics'," (Van Deth,

2016). “The definition of ‘community’ [...] has now expanded to include not only local geography, but a profession, skill trade, niche market or global workplace,”” (Caouette, 2013).

Finally, public service is a “service that is performed for the benefit of the public or its institutions,” (Vocabulary.com, 2018).

Literature Review

Urban Student Trends

Urban colleges students like to explore and interact with all different types of people and cultures (Lindsay, 2015). However, Suburban college students like going to the city, but they want to have the option to get away from the urban atmosphere and enjoy nature (Lindsay, 2015). Urban students also “love to go out on the town, experience a wide variety of cultural events, and meet lots of new people outside of those who attend their same school,” (Lindsay, 2015). “Students from urban high schools also lagged behind: 35 percent of students from urban schools completed a degree within six years of graduation, compared to 42 percent from rural schools and 45 percent from suburban schools,” (National Student Clearinghouse, 2017). Plus, more Black and Latino students attend urban universities than suburban students ((National Student Clearinghouse, 2017).

Suburban Student Trends

A 2017 study by the National Student Clearing House Research Center said that 67% of students from suburban high schools were more likely to immediately enroll in University compared to 62% of urban high schools. Also, suburban high school students (88 percent) were more likely to return for their second year of college than urban high school (84 percent) (National Student Clearinghouse, 2017).

Civic Engagement Trends

In 2008, Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking surveyed the levels of civic and political engagement. The survey resulted that 79% of college graduates do more civic engagement than students in college, which is 72%. However, 67% college students who attend a suburban university are more likely to do civic engagement activities. While only 61% urban

student's students participate in civic engagement activities. Overall, 36% college students who are white engage in civic engagement activities, while 40% and 36% of African-American and Hispanic college student participate civic engagement (Finley, 2011).

Compare & Contrast Urban & Suburban College Student Trends

Urban students, who attend an urban university, have an overall university budget of \$102.4 million (Caouette, 2013). While Suburban student's university budget is \$50.2 million (Caouette, 2013). Plus, Suburban college students "use more adjunct faculty, but have the lowest unmet demand because of their community's diverse economic base and higher income," (Caouette, 2013). While Urban college students "rely heavily on adjunct faculty because they compete with other businesses in hiring qualified people, and therefore rely on part-timers who have other jobs," (Cauoette, 2013).

Methods

Design of Study

The study used a quantitative survey to collect data. The Community Service Attitudes Scale, a previously written instrument, was used for data collection. Additional custom questions were used. Sixteen of the scales original forty-six questions were used. Six original yes or no questions were added and seven Likert-scale questions were used. Data collection was done through an online survey through the Qualtrics online platform. The survey was sent to every person who participated in a course that required community service at both a mid-sized urban institution and a mid-sized suburban institution.

Participants

The total dataset used had 215 completed surveys. One hundred and thirty participants were from an urban campus, and eighty-five participants were from a suburban campus. Participants were gathered from a sample of convenience.

Data Analysis

Only full completed surveys were used for analysis. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A t-test analysis was used to answer the question research question one, “What are the differences between suburban and urban students in how they participate with civic engagement?”. The control group in this analysis was urban participants, and the experimental was suburban participants. Research question two “Do participants that post about politics on Twitter or Facebook register to vote?” was answered by using a bivariate correlation analysis.

Treatment of Data

Surveys were stored online in a password protected database through the Qualtrics program. Electronic data was then imported into SPSS software that was kept on the faculty researcher's password protected computer. Data will be kept and stored according to IRB policy at the researcher's institution.

Results

RQ1: What are the differences between suburban and urban students in how they participate with civic engagement?

The researchers ran a t-test analysis to see if there was any statistical significance in how participants in different locations engaged with their community. Campuses were categorized into an experimental suburban participants and control group and then answers on two questions, “Are you registered to vote?” and “College volunteers can make a significant difference in their community.” were used for analysis. No statistically significant findings were revealed through t-test analysis of these questions between suburban participants voter registration ($M = 1.26$, $SD = .59$), urban participants voter registration ($M = 1.25$, $SD = .49$), suburban volunteer attitudes ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .61$), and urban volunteer attitudes ($M = 4.67$, $SD = .54$). Voter registration analysis showed no significance ($t(215) = .18$, $p = .43$) and volunteers attitudes showed similar non-significance ($t(215) = .28$, $p = .20$).

RQ2: Do participants that post about politics on Twitter or Facebook register to vote?

A bivariate correlation analysis was run between the questions “Did you post in the last four years about politics?” and “Are you registered to vote?”. Data analysis indicated no statistically significant correlation ($p = .06$) between whether someone reports registering to vote and posting on social media about politics. The null hypothesis for this research question will not be rejected. However, the p-value is close to significance. We recommend conducting further research to see if significance is found.

Discussion

RQ1 What are the differences between suburban and urban students in how they participate with civic engagement?

There were limitations of the study. Both institutions were in the Northeast. Some students live in an urban environment and attend a suburban institution and vice-versa. Since, we found no statistically significant findings to answer this question. We found evidence that there is no difference between suburban and urban students and how they participate with civic engagement.

RQ2 Do participants that post about politics on Twitter or Facebook register to vote?

According to Pew Research Center, in 2018 7% of 18- to 24-year-olds use Snapchat, and (71%) visit the platform multiple times per day. “Similarly, 71% of Americans in this age group now use Instagram and close to half (45%) are Twitter users,” (Smith, 2018). Forty-two percent of the participants said they sent a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue and fifty-eight percent of participants reported that they didn’t. Seventy-nine percent of participants reported they were registered to vote. However, there was no finding a statistically significant correlation between voter registration and social media.

Recommendations for Professionals Working With Young People

Young People clearly respond and encourage with social media. Advertising and working through social media could advance young people to encourage in their community. Use platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram to get the word out.

Learning Outcomes

LO 1: Demonstrate the ability to create a literature review.

After reading tons of literature reviews, I learned the format. I discovered there were headings, particular sections to write, and how to write the literature review in past tense. Also, I learned that literature reviews are in APA format.

LO 2: Demonstrate the ability to write non-biased questions.

When making questions you have to be clear and concise. However, using scaled questions helped you have non-bias surveys. Also, make your questions short and simple. For example: "What is your age?"

LO 3: Produce evidence for research.

Using peer-reviewed literature helped produce evidence for research. This has helped me understand the importance of research and learn the tricks of researching. Plus, I learned where to get peer review literature with the help of using the Pace University library.

Reflection of Overall Experience

Pace University's CCAR really trained me and stayed on task with me throughout this whole process. They taught me the tools on how to research using books and peer review literature materials. They taught me on how to read qualitative and quantitative results. They helped me understand how not to ask non-bias questions.

I would not have been able to do this project without my research advisors, Tyler and Heather. They were always available and willing to help when I asked for it understanding data results. Their love and support is something I wish all research interns get a Pace University.

“What are the differences between suburban and urban students in how they participate in civic engagement?” This question started the “Differences Community Service and Political Perceptions: Urban and Suburban Campuses” project. As a college student, I never thought I could actually ask this question and turn that one question into a research project. I am incredibly grateful for this experience.

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