

ICES-ADP Project

Measuring the Civic Engagement of Young People

Robert Shumer, Ph.D, Community Faculty, Robert.Shumer@metrostate.edu,
drrdsminn@msn.com; 651-336-7777, College of Individualized Studies

Program

Minnesota has been involved in promoting civic engagement for a long time. From the development of Campus Compact in the early 1990s at the college level, to the creation of the National Youth Leadership Council and K-12 service-learning efforts in schools across the state in the early 1980s, involvement of young people in service and civic issues has been a great state-level agenda.

While many school districts and universities/colleges across the state promote and develop service-learning and civic engagement programs, community organizations, especially the YMCA and the Minnesota Alliance With Youth, have been developing extra-curricular efforts to engage young people in civic programs for decades. The YMCA has been operating a Youth In Government program that involves high school age youth in mock government efforts to help them learn about the civic/legislative process and to give young people an opportunity to actually practice the legislative process.

The Minnesota Alliance with Youth has been developing numerous civic engagement efforts with young people in after-school programs for a similarly long time. Their most recent effort is the development, in collaboration with the Minnesota legislature, of the Minnesota Youth Council. This program connects four students from the eight Minnesota congressional districts, and four at-large youth, with members of the Minnesota legislature to review and develop legislation that affects young people throughout the state. Each youth, accompanied by an adult mentor/partner, meets four times a year in St. Paul to work with state legislators, spending the remaining time working through on-line learning and convening, to provide a strong youth perspective to all the government operations.

At the college level, programs and courses, from the University of Minnesota programs on civic engagement, to Metropolitan State's Civic Engagement minor, bring college students into the community for all kinds of civic actions and community-based learning. One of the courses at Metropolitan State University required for the Civic Engagement Minor is IDST 310: Principles of Civic Engagement. One of the key activities in this course is to engage in a civic engagement project, connecting students with community agencies or community projects to get involved in the civic process and to learn basic theories of civic engagement.

One of the challenges of the IDST 310 course is involving students, often low-income or students working multiple jobs, in the community project. It is expected that students spend 3 or more hours per week working on their community engagement. However, in the past few years, several students have had difficulty managing the course with their community responsibilities. The added expense of travel to a community agency and time involved in doing community work has been a burden for some students. An opportunity to provide some financial support to these students would help them, and their community agencies, to fulfill their civic responsibilities.

Program

The goal of this ICES-ADP project is to connect several of the Minnesota civic engagement initiatives to develop and expand knowledge about the impact of these efforts on the civic learning of the student participants and on the impact of their civic work on community change/improvement. As such, students from the IDST 310 course will learn to conduct evaluation processes (such as focus groups, interviews, and reflective journal analysis) and will collaborate with the two secondary school programs (Youth in Government and the Minnesota Youth Council) to assess the learning derived by the youth participants related to their community and legislative impact. They will also conduct interviews, self-analysis, and focus groups within the IDST 310 course to determine what basic civic learning is occurring as the course develops.

While the IDST 310 course doesn't officially start at the beginning of the Spring semester in January (because it is a compressed course that begins March 2) students already signed up for the course will be contacted and offered an opportunity to become evaluators for the course. Their responsibilities, as noted above, are to conduct self evaluations, focus groups with at least 6 of the students enrolled in the course, and the extended evaluation work with the Youth in Government and Minnesota Alliance With Youth Minnesota Youth Council to determine some of the basic civic outcomes of student involvement in these programs. One of the unique opportunities this year is to involve one of the Youth In Government students who is also participating in the Minnesota Youth Council. This dual role will allow this individual to do a self evaluation of his learning in both programs and to conduct a youth-led focus group with select members of the Youth Council to determine what they are learning about the civic engagement process.

Dr. Shumer, instructor for the ISDT 310 course, has been working with Orville Lindquist, Director of Youth in Government, and Frank Wagner, Director of the MN Alliance With Youth/MN Youth Council program for the past year on various issues. This grant will help to move the collaboration focus to evaluation and assessment of the two programs and help engage both community members in the continued relationship with the ISDT 310 course.

In order to accomplish these goals, Dr. Shumer, who teaches the IDST 310 course and who has background in both civic engagement and participatory evaluation (he was President of the Minnesota Evaluation Association and has taught courses on civic engagement and participatory evaluation) will conduct a short introductory workshop for the IDST 310 students involved (3 or 4) in January or February, as well as the youth member of the Minnesota Youth Council, on topics related to participatory methods of evaluation, such as focus groups, interviews, and reflective journaling. He will then monitor and advise the students as they conduct their evaluation efforts with the two youth organizations and the Metropolitan State University course. While the course will still be in operation in April, he will collect reports from these students at the end of March to prepare for the presentation on April 7 at the President's Circle for Community Engagement meeting.

Timeline:

December/January: Select the students from the ISDT 310 course for involvement in the program and contact the Youth in Government/MN Youth Council member for involvement in the effort.

Work with Frank Wagner and Orville Lindquist to develop the logistics for collaboration between all involved.

January/February: Provide a short introductory workshop on participatory evaluation for all involved. Establish a timeline for actual interviews, reflective journal data collection.

February/March: Collect data through interviews, focus groups, reflective journals.

End of March: Write up reports based on data collected from youth participants and IDST 310 students.

April 1-5: Write up final report summarizing results from the various participants.

April 7: Present findings at the President's Circle for Community Engagement.

June 14, 2016: Submit all budget requests for expendable items and any final report revisions.

Budget:

Student stipends: \$250 for IDST students (maximum of 4):	\$1200
\$200 for high school student MY Youth Council/YIG	
Community Organization supervisor: Stipend of \$200 for Frank Wagner and Orville Lindquist to coordinate interactions in their programs	400
Transcriptions of focus groups/interviews:	300

Photocopy: Production/distribution of individual reports and final reports	50
Total Budget:	\$1950

Appendix: Letters of Support

Dear Metropolitan State University Engaged Scholarship Review Team:

I'm writing in support of and to endorse Dr. Robert Shumer's plan for supporting evaluation of the Minnesota Youth Council's legislative and civic engagement impact in the 2016 Minnesota state legislative session. In particular, it would be very beneficial to have the support of two or three of his IDST 310 course students to guide the evaluation process. We at the Minnesota Youth Council feel this would be of great to our benefit and would greatly appreciate the support of Metropolitan State University!

Sincerely,

Frank Wagner
 Director of Youth Engagement
 Minnesota Alliance With Youth
 fwagner@mnyouth.net
 651-788-1530

November 30, 2015

To the Metropolitan State University Engaged Scholarship Review Team:

I write in support of Dr. Rob Shumer's project for evaluation of Minnesota YMCA Youth in Government's civic engagement impact and am especially interested in how that impact and the work of the Minnesota Youth Council may have mutual benefit.

We have discussed some of these issues in the past, regarding program evaluation, so I am excited about the prospect of bringing high school students and college students together to collect information and their work to determine results.

Sincerely,

Orville Lindquist
 State Program Executive
 Orville.lindquist@ymcatwincities.org
 612.821.6503