

Department/School/Program SoTL Initiative Grant Reports (2009-2010)

Advancing the Discipline: Expanding the Role of Communication in Civic and Political Engagement through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; School of Communication

In 2009, the School of Communication applied for the SoTL Small Grant award for departmental or school initiatives. Our proposal consisted of an initiative to spread civic engagement throughout the school by training Communication teachers, encouraging projects, and adding the vocabulary of civic engagement throughout the entire School. Our cohort was comprised of three graduate assistants, a non-tenure track instructor and two tenured faculty members. We were fortunate to receive the grant, and as such moved forward with our plans of injecting civic engagement throughout the School of Communication.

We began our initiative at the beginning of the fall semester by conducting pre-tests in select experimental courses in the School that were going to introduce (or continue to teach) civic engagement. We also had a number of control courses where civic engagement was not going to be discussed. We then administered post-tests at the end of the semester in both groups of courses. During the course of the semester, we also conducted two training workshops for Communication faculty on how to infuse civic engagement issues, projects and assignments into their courses (both current and future courses).

At the conclusion of the fall semester, we were able to discern from the data that there were statistically significant increases in political efficacy, political knowledge, perceived engagement, communication skills, and likeness of instructor and course (among other positive findings) – as compared with the control groups. Also important to note is that these skills improved over the course of the semester without altering the students' initial political affiliation, suggesting that civic engagement learning does not ideologically persuade students one way or another.

We presented these findings at three different workshops/conferences after the fall semester. In January 2009, we offered a poster and a presentation of these findings at the CTLT Teaching and Learning Symposium. In April, we presented our findings at the annual Central States Communication Association conference, held in St. Louis. Finally, in June we presented our findings as well as suggestions for future initiatives at the annual American Democracy Project (hosted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities), held in Baltimore. In all instances, we gratefully acknowledged the generosity of ISU's SoTL initiative grant. Other outcomes are obviously the increased and enhanced teaching of civic engagement in our courses and the anticipation of journal submissions in the near future.

See web snapshot at: <http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=35649313997151>