

***Civic Engagement Meets Service Learning:
Improving Wikipedia’s Coverage of State Government Officials***

Online appendix to supplement paper

Student contributions to Wikipedia in the fall 2019 and spring 2020 semesters have these impact statistics:

Impact	Summer 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020*
New articles added	7	18	4
Existing pages edited	14	28	10
Total edits	407	555	212
Words added	9,590	22,100	8,540
Views of edited pages	18,500	8,640	4,800
Media commons uploads	3	4	4
References added	178	274	51

** The spring 2020 semester was interrupted by COVID, causing some reshuffling of course requirements and fewer students completing the project.*

Quantitative analysis of student views

Table 1 reports the mean change in students’ responses to a number of civic engagement-related questions. In the first and last weeks of the semester, students filled out a survey of questions drawn from American National Election Study questionnaires. Our Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning (IERP) staff field the survey and match pre/post survey results before sharing anonymized data to faculty teaching the American government course. Figure 1 plots these mean changes visually as histograms.

The full survey instrument follows Table 1 and shares the exact question language and response options. To compute the “mean change” displayed in Table 1 and Figure 1, I took the value of response to the second-wave questionnaire and subtracted the value of the first-wave questionnaire. If responses are along a left-right scale, a negative number on this change variable means the student’s answer moved to the left after taking the class; a positive number means the student’s answered moved to the right.

For example, students were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement, “Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.” Response options ranged from 1 (disagree strongly) to

5 (agree strongly). The mean change was -0.69, indicating that, on average, students felt better able to understand what is happening with government after taking the course.

Arguably the most important question of the political efficacy battery asked students to respond to this statement: “Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won’t make any difference to what happens. Others say that who people vote for can make a big difference to what happens. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself?” This question is particularly important in gauging political efficacy because it most directly tests whether citizen participation in the most direct means of democratic governance—voting—is perceived as influential. Response options ranged from 1 (does not matter) to 5 (really matters). The mean change on this item was the largest of any question in the survey; students moved nearly a full unit (on average) in the more positive direction, suggesting they left the course more convinced their vote makes a difference.

Full details on the changes (along with standard deviation, giving a sense of how varied the students’ changes in attitudes were) are in Table 1. The histograms in Figure 1 display the distribution of changes visually.

Table 1: Change in students' attitudes about government (post-pre)

Question text	Mean change	Standard deviation
1. Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	-0.69	2.05
2. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.	0.51	1.84
3. Public officials don't care much what people like me think.	0.23	1.8
4. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	0.17	2.35
5. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?	-0.06	0.59
6. How many of the people running the government are corrupt?	0.17	1.04
7. How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think?	0.29	0.93
8. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?	0.46	1.15
9. Some people say that it doesn't make any difference who is in power. Others say that it makes a big difference who is in power. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself?	-0.03	1.42
10. Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won't make any difference to what happens. Others say that who people vote for can make a big difference to what happens. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself?	0.86	1.56
11. How often do you discuss politics with friends or family?	0.37	1.31

N=35

Civic Engagement Project Pre-/Post-Test Survey

Language for the survey instrument questions below comes from American National Election Study survey language.

1. Below are a few statements about public life. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of them?
Same scale for these four:
1 – disagree strongly; 3 – neither agree nor disagree; 5 – agree strongly
 - a. Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
 - b. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.
 - c. Public officials don't care much what people like me think.
 - d. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
2. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
 - a. Run by a few big interests
 - b. For the benefit of all the people
3. How many of the people running the government are corrupt?
 - a. All
 - b. Most
 - c. About half
 - d. A few
 - e. None
4. How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think?
 - a. A good deal
 - b. Some
 - c. Not much
5. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?
 - a. Always
 - b. Most of the time
 - c. About half of the time
 - d. Some of the time
 - e. Never
6. Some people say that it doesn't make any difference who is in power. Others say that it makes a big difference who is in power. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself?
 - a. 1 – it doesn't make any difference who is in power
 - b. 5 – it makes a big difference who is in power
7. Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won't make any difference to what happens. Others say that who people vote for can make a big difference to what happens. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself?
 - a. 1 - who people vote for won't make any difference
 - b. 5 – who people vote for can make a big difference

8. How often do you discuss politics with friends or family?