Community Organizing & Activism Lit Review

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Introduction

Community Organizing and Activism is one of the six Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement, which, collectively, describe diverse opportunities to contribute to the collective good. These six pathways, while they overlap and intersect, also possess unique individual characteristics. Within the six pathways, Community Organizing and Activism is derived from understanding community needs (Community Engaged Learning and Research) and serves as the gateway to address those needs via engagement with Policy and Governance.

This literature review is a broad exploration of the Community Organizing and Activism pathway focused on the following questions:

- What foundational knowledge would students pursue in this pathway?
- What skills would make students successful in this field?
- What attributes would students have the opportunity to cultivate?
- What are the ways in which social impact is described within this pathway/ how will students have the opportunity to affect change in this pathway?

Defining Community Organizing and Activism

Community Organizing and Activism is a subset of what is traditionally seen as civic engagement and civic participation. Specifically, this pathway of public service entails educating and mobilizing individuals and groups to take collective action to address issues of public concern (Stanford University, n.d.). Community organizing and activism serves both as a mechanism to tackle a specific problem, and as a long-term empowerment strategy to develop capacity, power, and influence of underrepresented groups to shape decisions on issues that affect their lives. But to clearly understand what this pathway entails and where and how it sits within the civic engagement framework, we need to first explore and define civic engagement itself.

There are many definitions of civic engagement; Thomas Ehrlich (2000) captures the core elements of them all:

"*Civic engagement means 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. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.*" (Preface, p. vi)

Ehrlich (2000) further elucidates the characteristics of a civically engaged person:

"*A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes [themself] as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.*"
(Introduction, p. xxvi)

However, Ehrlich's definition does not emphasize global citizenship or social justice. For that, we can consider the definition offered by Carol Musil (2009):

"Civic engagement is acting on a heightened sense of responsibility to one's communities that encompasses the notions of global citizenship and interdependence, participation in building civil society, and empowering individuals as agents of positive social change to promote social justice locally and globally." (p. 59).

Combining these two definitions we can distill three key elements of civic engagement: (1) cultivating a sense of civic responsibility to improve society; (2) being an active participant in civic life in political and/or non-political ways; and (3) recognizing oneself as an agent of change in promoting social justice both locally and globally.

Though there is general consensus on the definition, the literature on civic engagement suggests that in its application, this term is used to refer to a wide range of political and non-political activities ranging from participating in the electoral process, to democratic deliberation, to volunteering, to advocacy and activism (Checkoway, 2009; Fleming,

2011; Ekman & Amnå, 2012;). So much happens under the umbrella of civic engagement that Checkoway and Aldana (2013), argue for the necessity of distinguishing among the various types of civic engagement. They propose four forms of civic engagement as follows:

- *Citizen participation*: participating through formal, established political and governmental institutions
- *Grassroots organizing*: organizing action groups for social or political causes to influence decisions of established institutions
- *Intergroup dialogue*: facilitating dialogue and discussion to enable people to communicate in structured discussions about social identity and systems of power to enable collective capacity for action
- *Sociopolitical development*: developing awareness and promoting empowerment to facilitate societal engagement and collective action

For the purposes of this literature review, the focus will be on three of the forms of civic engagement: grassroots organizing, intergroup dialogue, and sociopolitical development as they are the core elements of what it means to be a community organizer and activist. Citizen participation is the outcome of successful community organizing and activism.

History and Background

Origins of Community Organizing and Activism

Community organizing and activism emerged from two distinct but related movements connected with the concept of community. One thread is associated with the activities of social reformers and educators like Eduard Lindeman and Mary Parker Follett who advocated for self-determination and democratic leadership within a community. Lindeman defined community organization as: "those phases of social organization which constitute a conscious effort on the part of a community to control its affairs democratically, and to secure the highest services from its specialists, organizations, agencies, and the institutions by means of recognized interrelations" (1921, p.173). The role of the specialist (read community organizer) was to work with the different (and perhaps

conflicting) forces in the community. Follett similarly argued that group networks which attended to people's needs and aspirations within the community were a necessary component of democracy. She emphasized the need for neighborhood education as a means to strengthen group life: "(t)o be a democrat is not to decide on a certain form of human association, it is to learn how to live with other [people]… The group process contains the secret of collective life, it is the key to democracy, it is the master lesson for every individual to learn, it is our chief hope or the political, the social, the international life of the future" (1918, p. 22-23).

The other historical thread underpinning the contemporary model of community organizing and activism was the demand for social change that came from labor protests and union activity. While labor unions have existed in some fashion since colonial times (Reynolds, 2009), the types of unions that exist today arose during the industrial revolution as worker organized strikes became a means for disadvantaged factory workers to gain protection and power over their employer (ushistory.org, 2023). Saul Alinsky is frequently recognized as the founder of community organizing who during the Depression worked in Chicago's Back of the Yards district. As Slayton (1996) explains, Alinsky set up the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) which succeeded in uniting a mix of otherwise antagonistic Catholic ethnic groups and African Americans to demand, and win, concessions from local meatpackers. Unlike others working in poor urban areas, the BYNC was based on local democracy. Alinsky codified the key strategies and aims of community organizing in his writing especially *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) and *Rules for Radicals* (1971). His thinking about, and approach to organizing emphasized the following five elements: (1) democratic decision making such that local residents controlled their own destiny, (2) working mainly through established organizational networks, (3) addressing people's self-interest, (4) use of conflict strategies, and (5) fighting for specific and concrete results. The focus of Alinsky-type conflict organizing came under criticism as a "kind of dead-end local activism" (Riessman, 1967, p. 475) that "neither implies a radical view of society nor calls for radical social change" (p. 469) by those who wanted to transform the existing system and build alternate

institutions. Nonetheless, the Alinsky method of community organizing was adopted by many organizations working on a variety of issues including civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and women's liberation among others.

What Community Organizing and Activism Is and Is Not

Today, community organizing is widely seen as a force of social change that is mobilized locally but works with wider alliances which act in their collective self-interest to address a shared problem. Based on Alinsky's approach, community organizers generally assume that social change involves conflict and struggle in order to attain collective power for the powerless. However, going beyond the Alinsky model (Schutz, 2008), at its core, community organizing seeks to develop a robust local democracy and generate durable power for an organization that represents the community such that it has the capacity to influence key decision-makers on a range of issues.

Schutz (2008) further suggests that understanding what community organizing *is* can be furthered by understanding what it *is not*:

- *Mobilizing* is not organizing given its focus on addressing a particular issue on a short-term basis without a comprehensive and coherent long-term strategy.
- *Advocacy* is not organizing because advocates often speak on behalf of those who are considered unable to represent their own interests, in contrast to community organizing that underscores the importance of those affected to speak for themselves.
- *Legal action* is not organizing, when a social action strategy is constructed primarily around a lawsuit as this can push the grassroots struggle into the background and circumvent the development of durable power in the community.
- *Social movement building* is not organizing, for while movements are held together by common aims, they can lack a durable organizational structure and can often dissolve once the core issue is addressed.

Why Community Organizing and Activism matters

A global health pandemic, the existential threat of climate change, regional conflicts, the systemic disparagement of Black lives in the United States and around the world all highlight the necessity of a civil society. According to Lund et al. (2006), civil society is the public sphere that occupies the political space between an individual and the government. It involves an active and diverse citizenry working through organized groups or institutions who help influence and monitor government decisions; mobilize the population and educate them on their rights and responsibilities; and facilitate social reconciliation through such means as intergroup dialogue. Civil society is a necessary ingredient for democracy and a healthy democracy entails citizen participation. Engaged citizens participate in discourse to exchange ideas, and invest in finding solutions to address issues facing their communities. Not only does this strengthen democracy, it also empowers individuals by helping people see that they can have a say in what goes on in their communities.

When people are more engaged in their communities, they also tend to be more invested in their communities' well-being and this directly correlates to greater reported community satisfaction. The 2021 American Community Life Survey (Cox et al., 2021) found that social capital (i.e. the network of relationships among people who live and work in a particular community) was a key factor in how Americans rate their communities. Those who report higher levels of formal (such as engagement and/or volunteering as part of religious or community organizations) or informal social interaction (with friends and neighbors) view their communities as excellent. In connection to civic engagement, over 41% of Americans who regularly volunteer think their communities are excellent places, compared to just 24% of those who do not volunteer. The report infers that these correlations between social interactions like civic engagement and people's perceptions of their communities are "evidence of the power of regular, meaningful interaction with friends, neighbors, and people in groups with whom we feel a kind of kinship. Feeling connected to others in a community is closely related to how one views that community (Cox et al., 2021, Community Satisfaction, Safety, and Trust section). Overall, the survey data indicate that some 66% of Americans who report feeling

closely connected to their communities rate them as excellent places to live, compared to 13% of those who do not feel closely connected.

While the need for—and value of—civic engagement is clear, recent surveys show dissatisfaction with democratic systems. In their analysis of a mega-dataset of 4,000 unique surveys conducted between 1973 - 2020 representing 160 countries and 4.8 million respondents, Foa et al. (2020) discovered a rising discontent with democracy beginning in 1973, and hitting a global high in 2019 especially in developed democracies. The decline in global satisfaction has been sharpest since 2005, when dissatisfaction levels were 38.7%. Since then, the proportion of dissatisfied citizens has increased by 18.8%. This data is corroborated by a 2018 Pew Research Study that surveyed people from 27 countries (Wike et al., 2019).

Analyzing the same data with a generational lens, Foa et al. (2000) reveal that Millennials are even more dissatisfied with democracy both in absolute terms, and also relative to older cohorts at comparable life stages. The study's authors suggest that this youth discontent can likely be attributed to the intergenerational disparity in life opportunities, and thus may reflect antipathy—over apathy—due to the failure of democratic institutions and processes to deliver substantive change. This could be the reason for rise of populism among the youth which "signals that existing structures have failed to address long standing resentments in society, ranging from inequalities of wealth, to economic insecurity, to malfeasance among economic and social elites. If the populist challenge shocks moderate parties and leaders into taking measures to reverse these trends – rather than engaging in cosmetic attempts to rebrand the politics of the past – then the populist wave may still prompt democracy's rebirth, rather than the onset of its gradual decay (p. 36)."

Though this study did not include Gen Z—the majority of undergraduate students today, survey reports from the Pew Research Center suggests that Gen Zers, at least in the US, while racially and ethnically more diverse than previous generations and on track to be the best-educated generation (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), share similar viewpoints as Millennials on current social and political issues (Parker et. al, 2019). Take the issue of climate change as one example: in a Pew Research Center survey (Tyson

et. al, 2021), American Millennials and Gen Zers have higher levels of engagement with the issue in comparison with older adults. They engage with more climate change content online and they talk more about the necessity for action. And, while their voting record may be lower than older generations, 32% of Gen Zers and 28% of Millennials have taken at least one of the following four actions to address climate change compared with 23% of Gen X and 21% of Baby Boomer and older generations: contacting an elected official, attending a rally or protest, volunteering, and/or donating money. This suggests that they are actively doing more, and perhaps feel more empowered to affect change. Unlike older generations, the youth look to the government (rather than individuals or businesses) to solve problems. Fully 70% of Gen Zers and 64% of Millennials say the government should do more to solve problems, compared to 53% of Gen Xers, 49% of Boomers, and 39% of Silents (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). This also validates the sense of intergenerational inequity in life opportunities that younger generations feel, as anxiety about the future is a common emotional response, especially among Gen Z (69%) compared to 59% of Millennials, 46% of Gen Xers, and 41% of Baby Boomers and older generations (Tyson et. al, 2021).

So how do we reconcile and integrate these seemingly disparate elements? First, the importance of a civil society juxtapositioned alongside the general dissatisfaction with democratic systems? And second, the antipathy among youth due to the failure of democratic processes to deliver substantive change juxtapositioned alongside their belief that it is the responsibility of government to solve problems? In particular, what is the role of higher education in enabling sociopolitical development among youth such that they engage in intergroup dialog to enable capacity for action, and are empowered to advance collective action that influences institutional decisions to mitigate their concerns about intergenerational inequity and anxieties about the future?

Foundational Knowledge and the Role of Higher Education

The connection between education, social reform, and democracy dates back to John Dewey who articulated in *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897) that education is not just about gaining content knowledge and skills, but also about using that knowledge and those skills for the greater good in an ever-changing world: "With the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence[,] it is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions. To prepare [them] for the future life means to give [them] command of [themself]; it means so to train [them] that [they] will have the full and ready use of all [their] capacities." In *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey argued that for a democratic society to continually renew and sustain itself, it must have an educational system that teaches citizenship skills such as deliberation, openness to alternative viewpoints, and critical thinking. Blair and McCartney (2021) reinforce Dewey's ideas in making the case that a "lack of practicing skills and values of democracy is directly correlated to a decline in civic engagement education" (p. 3).

Educators agree that the college years are critical in the development of civic knowledge, civic identity, and predisposition for civic engagement (Colby et al., 2003; Knefelkamp, 2008; Hatcher, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2015; Richard, 2016). But, there is less agreement on what constitutes a civic identity, ways to promote civic responsibility, and how to assess effectiveness in preparing students to be civically active—in other words, how to cultivate a change agent.

Julie Hatcher (2011) suggests that civic knowledge is at least partly dependent on the discipline. For example, while "(p)olitical science may emphasize knowledge of political action, how a bill becomes a law, or the role of organizations to lobby and shape public policy… (s)ocial work may emphasize the role of advocacy, collective action, or social justice" (pp. 83-84). But, Hatcher (2011) also submits that knowledge is dynamic and ever-changing; it is socially constructed and thus can be co-created; it can be actionable and empowering. Moreover, in addition to civic knowledge, Hatcher (2011) underscores the importance of civic skills and civic identity in supporting the capacity for civic action.

Similarly, the 2012 Report, *A Crucible Moment* (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012), provides a multidimensional definition of civic learning that includes four categories: knowledge, skills, values, and collective action. The report states "full civic literacies cannot be garnered only by studying books; democratic knowledge and capabilities also are honed through hands-on, face-to-face, active engagement in the midst of differing perspectives about how to address common problems that affect the well-being of the nation and the world" (p. 3).

In this spirit of active engagement, Matthews (2006) and Fleming (2011) advocate for a curriculum that is comprised of two key practices: democratic deliberation and social action. Other authors (Corning & Myers, 2002; Hemer & Reason, 2017) suggest adding the practice of democratic dissent or activism, defined as engagement in "various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors" (Corning & Myers, 2002, p. 704), to this list of parameters. They "conceptualize activism as fulfilling three requirements: (a) activism must be situated in collective interests, (b) activism must address some perceived problem or injustice affecting a collective, and (c) activism must be concerned with producing or preventing change" (Hemer & Reason, 2017, p. 38).

McCartney (2013, pp. 8-9), offers a robust and inclusive description of civic engagement education as an evidence-based pedagogy which includes:

- developing knowledge about the community, its systems, and its problems,
- seeking constructive solutions to these problems through deliberation and active participation,
- building skills to enable students to pursue these solutions,
- fostering values of lifelong participation and democracy; and
- offering opportunities to experience this participation to build a sense of efficacy that one's voice and actions matter.

McCartney (2013, p. 9) further clarifies what civic engagement education is not:

- It includes, but is not the same as political engagement, a subset of civic engagement, that is explicitly politically oriented.
- It is different from volunteerism, as such experiences are not connected to academic learning, do not require reflection on causes of the situation for which one is volunteering, or finding solutions.
- Service-learning can be a pedagogical tool of civic engagement education, though it is not a required component.

This framework of civic engagement education offers a meaningful explication of the foundational knowledge necessary for the Community Organizing and Activism pathway with the following additions:

- The differences, overlaps, and interplay between this pathway and others in the toolkit should be explored.
- The actionable solutions along this pathway primarily involve educating and mobilizing individual or collective action to address an issue which could include grassroots organizing to influence or persuade; intergroup dialogue to enable communication and facilitate collective capacity for action; and sociopolitical development to build awareness, promote empowerment, and encourage societal engagement (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).
- The foundational knowledge required to become proficient in this pathway, to some extent, will be dependent on disciplinary perspectives – in other words students should be familiar with the issue they are addressing and should be able to differentiate between fact (statements which can be shown to be true), and opinion (statements that express judgments or ideas).
- It is necessary to understand what the educational piece should entail and how and where to disseminate it; and similarly what mobilization is necessary and how to influence or persuade others.

Much of this linkage between education and the development of a change agent is verified in a job profile report by the Community Learning Partnership (CLP), a national network of community change studies programs based in community colleges (Community Learning Partnership,

2013). While the report acknowledges that "[t]he traditional path to professional community organizing could proceed with or without a college degree," the report also recognizes that "(t)his is rapidly changing as the social, economic and political challenges organizers face become more complex, and as a degree becomes a credential that employers, including community organizations, more frequently require" (Community Learning Partnership, 2013, p. 3). The report specifically identifies the following elements that an educational program could provide: a theoretical framework, the history of social movements, examples of organizing efforts, approaches to strategic analysis, pedagogy of participatory education, understanding of government structure and community support, communication skills like writing and public speaking, and time management and organizational skills (Community Learning Partnership, 2013).

Skills, Attributes, and Opportunities for Social Impact

Skills and Attributes as a Factor of the Duties of a Community Organizer

There is significant consensus (Corning & Myers, 2002; Matthews, 2006; Fleming, 2011; Hatcher, 2011; Hemer & Reason, 2021) that while foundational knowledge is important, it is not sufficient to become proficient in the Community Organizing and Activism pathway. Becoming an effective change agent requires developing skills and attributes in order to be able to execute the primary duties associated with community organizing. These primary functions of a community organizer are identified in Community Learning Partnership report (2013, p. 5) as follows:

- *Find and build a base* of community members committed to the cause/project.
- *Train, support, and educate community leaders* who will help build the base.
- *Identify issues* that affect and motivate the base to take action.
- *Move the base to action through strategic campaigns* to achieve goals and build leadership skills.

- *Build organizational power* so that the base and the broader community they identify with can win their campaigns and shape the social and political structures and processes that affect them.

Barbara Radke (University of Minnesota Extension, n.d.) elaborates a five-step process that can be used in a variety of settings to help students develop the necessary skills and foster particular attributes in an intentional and holistic manner:

- *Prepare*: Understand the context in which the issue will be addressed and determine the approach (grassroots organizing, intergroup dialogue, public discussion).
- *Inquire*: Conduct dialogue to better understand all aspects of the issue including exploring and clarifying possible underlying issues. Deliberate to frame the issue.
- *Analyze*: Foster dialogue to explore various perspectives and viewpoints and deepen understanding of the issue. Deliberate to generate options.
- *Synthesize*: Conduct dialogue to align the clarified issue with identified options. Deliberate to reach a decision and translate the decision into a plan.
- *Implement*: Take collective action to address the issue.

Further, Radke suggests that to become effective change agents, students should be engaged in opportunities that support authentic discussion and reflection and are collaborative in nature. Students specifically need to develop:

- Discussion skills – which include both the ability to dialogue (a conversation to promote understanding) and deliberate (a conversation aimed at reaching a decision).
- Process skills – which include question design as well as the ability to listen, question, and re-frame the conversation.
- Practice as conveners in creating a collaborative environment – which requires utilizing credible and diverse sources of information, and being intentional about who is engaged in the process to provide a wide range of perspectives relative to the issue at hand.

Skills and Attributes as a Factor of Student Development

Much like other college curricula, civic engagement and activism should be approached as developmental and students should be provided scaffolded experiences. In particular, Hemer and Reason (2021) advocate for "prioritizing developmental structures of activism rather than the content associated with specific social issues" (p. 39). These authors suggest that an additional benefit of this developmental approach "is that students are not bifurcated into non-activist/activist dichotomy; rather, all students are seen to have the potential to become more participatory members of their communities" (p. 40).

This developmental approach parallels the ecological model of human development proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) which suggests that human development is the product of interaction between a person and their environment. In conceptualizing the environment, he conceived of four interrelated levels of nested systems: *microsystem* (the immediate environment), *mesosystem* (a set of microsystems within a given period of development), *exosystem* (contexts that do not directly involve the person but have an influence on the person's behavior and development), and *macrosystem* (the superordinate level that includes culture, public institutions, public policy that influences and shapes all the other levels). Authors have applied the concept of microsystem and mesosystem to higher education suggesting that the microsystem includes the influence of such elements as academic classes, student organizations, and peer groups on student development (Renn and Arnold, 2003) whereas the mesosystem refers to campus climate (Hemer and Reason, 2021). In terms of this pathway, what this means is that students' sociopolitical development requires both structured curricular and co-curricular experiences that hone the activist mindset, as well as a campus climate that nurtures community activism and participatory democracy.

Skills and Attributes as a Factor of Student Identity

It should be acknowledged that regardless of what civic position students have the potential to develop into, their identity does influence their civic action and especially activist behaviors (Hope et al., 2016; Morgan et al.,

2021; Hemer and Reason, 2021). As Duncan (2012) explains, socially constructed identities that experience injustice and/or are politicized are associated with collective action. For example, following the 2016 presidential election, the National Survey of Student Engagement included a supplemental item that asked about involvement in activism. Based on the answers of more than 3,000 respondents: students with a nonbinary gender identity as well as multiracial and Black or African American students were more likely to engage in socio-political discussion and sociopolitical action, whereas traditional-aged students as well as Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander students were less likely to engage in sociopolitical discussion or action (Morgan et al, 2021). But, it should be acknowledged here that the intersection of racial/cultural identity and activism is much more complex and nuanced when one digs a little deeper. The stereotype of Asian Americans as being apolitical is countered by Wray-Lake, Tang and Victorino (2016) in their analysis of civic engagement profiles among 3,556 Asian American students from the 2008 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey. This group is not as homogeneous as generally represented and they vary in civic participation (based on seven indicators of political and community participation) ranging from Voting Involved (57% of the sample), to Highly Involved (11% of the sample), to Uninvolved (32% of the sample). The determining factors for level of involvement include both demographic and contextual factors such as gender, whether they were U.S. born, parents' level of education, political views, academic engagement, and religious involvement.

The development model that Johnson (2017) proposes takes these factors of identity into consideration by depicting "the developmental process of civic identity formation grounded in participants' experiences" (p. 37):

- Nascent Awareness – "Part of What I Notice" describes a person's initial observation of civic behavior. Key influences for this position are family involvement in civic activities as well as personal involvement in organizations for young people such as school (student council and clubs) and church groups.
- Emergent Exploration – "Part of What I Do" describes when a person more actively chooses to get involved in various groups in high school

or college. Key influences for this position are cohort-based peer groups (Girl Scouts, Honors Society, Leadership Programs) that often were non-civic in focus but have a requirement for mandatory service hours.

- Developing Commitment – "Part of Who I Want To Be" describes when a person begins to value community involvement and thus deepen their level of participation in civic activities. Key influences that help develop this position are experiences (like alternative spring break, study abroad) that provide opportunities to develop a more robust understanding of social injustices, underscore the complexity of civic work, and clarify a future path for civic engagement through formal and informal reflection.
- Deepening Commitment – "Part of Who I Am" describes a position when a person becomes more confident in their commitment and their ability to work with others for positive societal change. Key influences that help develop this position include more multidimensional and advanced civic experiences embedded in coursework and programs of study that provide a supportive peer network and mentors, as well as opportunities for sustained reflection.
- Integration – "Who I Am" describes the final civic position which is when a person is able to demonstrate systems thinking, i.e., "the interplay and connections of institutions, policies, and processes in society that mediate social and civic issues" (p. 48). Key influences that help achieve this position include accommodating academic majors (that allow for integrating civic identity with post-college careers), mentors, a peer network, and a campus climate that supports all aspects of a civic identity.

Role of Higher Education in Developing Change Agents

As all the development models suggest, there are numerous opportunities to foster civic learning and the development of a civic identity. Some of these routes are rooted in student experiences such as choice of majors; influence of peer networks; involvement in athletics, Greek Life, student clubs and other co-curricular activities. Other paths are embedded in curricular/co-curricular practices, such as service learning courses, civic

engagement assignments, research with a faculty member, volunteering, learning communities, internships, and study abroad.

Evidence supports that campus climate and experiences influence the development of a civic identity and activism (Bowman et al., 2015; Wray-Lake et al., 2016). In their multi-institutional study on how "college students' backgrounds, collegiate engagement, and perceptions of the campus climate relate to the development of an activist orientation," Hemer and Reason (2021; p. 41) validate both models of civic development. Involvement in non-civic activities on campus such as cohort-based experiences like learning communities furthers a student's interest to engage in activism as proposed by Johnson (2017). Furthermore, as Renn and Arnold (2003) claim, a student's orientation to activism and dissent is strongly influenced by peer-to-peer conversations about contributing to the collective good confirming "that students' peers are among the most influential microsystems for student development" (Hemer and Reason, 2021; p. 48).

The research also reveals some tensions about the impact of campus climate and experience on civic identity and activism. One example is STEM classrooms. Compared to their peers pursuing humanities or social science majors, STEM majors exhibit lower inclination for activism (Morgan et al., 2021). This could be for a range of factors as Morgan et al. (2019) explain in the case of engineering students—the lack of civic identity development is likely a consequence of the amount of time spent on academic activities and the lack of an obvious connection between their course work and sociopolitical issues. However, the politicization of science in recent years, coupled with recognition that scientists need to be engaged in advocating for science and shaping how research is applied in communities is changing this landscape. As Jacoby (2022) describes, post-secondary institutions are investing in the development of civic agency in both future STEM professionals and in non-STEM majors taking STEM courses as part of their required general education curriculum. Furthermore, as evidenced in *Democracy Counts 2020* (Thomas et al., 2021), a report by Tuft University's Institute for Democracy and Higher Education examining nationwide electoral participation among college students in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, not only was

there a 14-point increase (from 2016) in the national student voting rate, but the gap in voting rates between STEM and non-STEM closed substantially. For example, in 2016 only 42% of Engineering students voted, but this number increased by 16 percentage points in 2020 to 58%.

Additionally, not all high impact practices result in developing an activist orientation. While service learning is clearly aligned with civic learning outcomes (Dey et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2016), Hemer and Reason (2021) show that "(s)ervice learning has a negative association with an activist orientation, yet volunteerism is positively related to an activist orientation" (p. 48). Stoecker (2016) argues that in order to be transformative, service learning "requires personal experiences of oppression and exploitation that the vast majority of students lack" (p. 41) and when service learning is institutionalized it "helps people understand and follow the bureaucratic rules rather than organize to change them" (p. 8).

To summarize -- providing opportunities for social impact and developing the skills necessary for the Community Organizing and Activism pathway in light of the influence of attributes, experience, and campus climate requires:

- Recognizing the relationship between identity and activism and the challenges of navigating structural oppression
- Understanding that activism describes a behavior which involves systems thinking and an intentional, sustained commitment to the collective good
- Understanding that even though student activism may seek to change the political landscape, it is not political governance
- Ensuring institutional support for student activism
- Providing scaffolded experiences in developing a civic identity and an activist orientation
- Offering students' a range of curricular and co-curricular experiences
- Being intentional in extending civic learning into all majors and especially those like STEM which lack such obvious connections

- Supporting students' civic development across multiple avenues such as grassroots organizing, intergroup dialog, and sociopolitical development.

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