

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

SPARK

SIUE Faculty Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

2022

Creditable Civic Engagement? Aligning Work on Civic Activity with Faculty Incentives

Kenneth W. Moffett

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, kmoffet@siue.edu

Laurie L. Rice

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, larice@siue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://spark.siu.edu/siue_fac



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moffett, Kenneth W. and Laurie L. Rice. "Creditable Civic Engagement? Aligning Work on Civic Activity with Faculty Incentives. Forthcoming in PS: Political Science and Politics.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SPARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in SIUE Faculty Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity by an authorized administrator of SPARK. For more information, please contact magrase@siue.edu, tdvorak@siue.edu.

Creditable Civic Engagement? Aligning Work on Civic Activity with Faculty Incentives

Kenneth W. Moffett, Professor
kmoffet@siue.edu

and

Laurie L. Rice, Professor
larice@siue.edu

Department of Political Science
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Less than two years into our time as assistant professors, our University's then-Director of Marketing and Communications emailed us to discuss a partnership between our institution, interested collaborators at Washington University in St. Louis, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.¹ This project's goal was to jointly administer a survey across both campuses of randomly chosen college students, subject to IRB approval at both sites.² The survey data would be used for a series of media articles about local college students and the 2008 election. While both of our training and primary research interests focused on American political institutions, we were also interested in political behavior. Thus, the possibility of collaborating with another institution alongside the media and pursuing interests in political behavior was alluring and exciting.

Then, reality struck. How could we participate in this time-intensive collaboration while doing that which was necessary to attain tenure and promotion (T&P)? How would we align this collaboration with how we are professionally evaluated? We answer both questions and discuss how we built upon this project to achieve broader goals. Also, we share lessons that we learned to advise others on making their civic engagement work count. Finally, we conclude with advice for institutions and administrators, as this work cannot effectually happen without support.

Faculty Evaluation and Civic Engagement

Had we confined our involvement to that initial partnership, this would have yielded a temporarily prestigious but time-intensive service activity that mattered little when we submitted our T&P files. Instead, we added questions to the surveys to build a pursuable research agenda. When we conducted the 2008 surveys of students at our institution, we examined the effects of political uses of Facebook on civic activity, as well as the issues that helped mobilize student electoral engagement. For example, did friending political figures or groups online foster enhanced offline civic activity? Also, how do holding and expressing opinions about differing political issues during a presidential election connect with civic engagement beyond voting? Using the 2008 data, we published two peer-reviewed

manuscripts. We ran surveys again during presidential election years in 2012, 2016, and 2020. Based on the data from these surveys, we published several additional items, including one book, two additional peer-reviewed journal articles, two op-ed pieces, and three book chapters.

After 2016, we used Amazon's mTurk platform to improve our research and data collection in 2018 and 2020, as it became increasingly difficult to publish manuscripts in respected peer-reviewed outlets solely or primarily based on data from students at our institution. Our upgraded data collection strategy reduced questions about generalizability and yielded another peer-reviewed book. These publications "counted" toward annual reviews and T&P. Our institution mandates peer-reviewed publications for T&P, but also counts op-ed pieces, book chapters, and conference presentations as supplemental forms of scholarship.

At most institutions, tenure-line faculty are not solely evaluated based on their research output. Teaching receives the highest weight in annual reviews and T&P decisions at our institution. We used our civic engagement work to positively impact our teaching. For example, one of us participated in a Focused Interest Community on leadership targeted toward first-year students who live on campus. This was part of a learning community where students living in the same residence hall wing all enrolled in the same class centered on the theme of leadership and civic activism. Students engaged with faculty outside of class in extracurricular activity related to this theme. In addition, we used active and service-learning techniques that increase civic engagement such as volunteering in voter registration initiatives (see e.g., Bennion 2006; Suarez 2017).

Our survey research also motivated us toward other pedagogies, including discussions about current political events in class that related to issues our surveys showed generated significant student concern, and linking those to the extant political science research about voting and political participation among young adults (Archer and Miller 2011; Moffett and Rice 2015). We made these

activities count by highlighting them in our teaching narratives and in other materials as part of our T&P dossiers, and once again, in our promotion dossiers to Professor.

Beyond teaching and research, the data we gathered for our research informed our service efforts after receiving tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. In 2016 and 2018, our campus participated in the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge, an effort to increase voting and civic activity among college students across the United States. To make our work more effective, we timed the 2016 Student Election Survey such that the pre-election administration ended prior to the closing date for that general election. Consequently, we used that data to discern which groups of students were prime targets for additional voter registration efforts, as registered voters are more likely to vote (Highton and Wolfinger 1998). We worked with on-campus organizations to follow up with these students to encourage them to register to vote, and if registered, to vote. This work was successful, as our campus was awarded a bronze medal in 2016, and a silver medal in 2018 for having high rates of student voting (All in Campus Democracy Challenge 2021). We highlighted these achievements in our promotion to Professor dossiers in 2017, and subsequent annual reviews.

Advice to Tenure-Line Colleagues

While we successfully counted civic engagement activities toward T&P, how would others similarly inclined do the same thing? Act as a single-minded seeker of T&P, or promotion to Professor. Do what your department and institution incentivize, or make your activities fit into what is incentivized. Those at Research One (R1) institutions should align their activities toward satisfying their research expectations and publishing in prominent outlets.³ Conversely, faculty at baccalaureate colleges with robust instructional responsibilities should craft their activities toward being evaluated favorably in teaching. Because our institution (a Research Three (R3)) values teaching and research, we fashioned our activities accordingly while ensuring that our publications appeared in externally valid venues.

Second, many universities publicly support civic engagement in their mission statement or values, but do not always value this work when evaluating personnel. To make your case for great annual reviews, T&P, or promotion to Professor, link your activities both to your institution's values and particularly, to evaluation requirements. Be your best advocate, as you cannot assume that those who review files will automatically value civic engagement work.

Third, good partnerships lighten the load on individuals and add value to the efforts undertaken. In part, be selective about potential research or service collaborators as working together generates much better outcomes than can be realized individually (Page 2017). Similarly, choose wisely with respect to campus and off-campus partners in pursuing these activities.

Conclusion

We conclude with advice to institutions and administrators. First, incentivize this activity to count toward annual reviews and T&P. Thankfully, these activities are easily countable toward annual reviews and T&P at our institution, and we were able to discern this from the clear set of T&P requirements our Department shared with us. Not all political scientists are similarly situated. If we want to move the needle on civic activity, create structures that incentivize faculty to be involved in this area. We get what we incentivize.

Second, fund and support this activity consistently. It is difficult to do meaningful work without sufficient funding, support, and resources. While we are grateful for the funding from varying sources internally that we have received over the years, we have also had to fund some of this work ourselves. Many more people will do this work if it has robust administrative support, and the quality of activities increase, too.

Third, appreciate the work that happens and the successes that come. This work takes time and effort, and happens collaboratively. Support and encouragement create an inviting environment that inspires others to be involved in civic engagement work. A supportive, appreciative atmosphere also

prevents those involved in this work from experiencing burnout. Civic engagement work is rewarding, but requires administrative support and good choices by faculty who engage in it.

Bio Notes:

Kenneth W. Moffett is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. He may be reached at kmoffet@siue.edu.

Laurie L. Rice is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She may be reached at larice@siue.edu.

References

All in Campus Democracy Challenge 2018. Participating Campuses.

<https://allinchallenge.org/participating-campuses/>. Accessed June 18, 2021.

Archer, Candice C. and Melissa K. Miller 2011. "Prioritizing Active Learning: An Exploration of Gateway Courses in Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44(2): 429-434.

Bennion, Elizabeth A. 2006. "Civic Engagement and Citizen Engagement: Mobilizing Voters as a Required Field Experiment." *Journal of Political Science Education* 2(2): 205-227.

Highton, Benjamin and Raymond E. Wolfinger 1998. "Estimating the Effects of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993." *Political Behavior* 20(2): 79-104.

Moffett, Kenneth W. and Laurie L. Rice. 2015. "Taking College-Level Political Science Courses and Civic Activity." In *Technology and Civic Engagement in the Classroom: Engaging the Unengaged*, ed. Stephen Caliendo, Suzanne Chod and William Muck. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. Pages 13-47.

Page, Scott E. 2017. *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Suarez, John 2017. "Promoting Civic Engagement in a Required General Education Course." In Elizabeth C. Matto; Alison Rios; Millett McCartney; Elizabeth A. Bennion; and Dick Simpson (eds.), *Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines*. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association. Pages 169-182.

¹ This initial contact occurred with the encouragement of our Chair at the time.

² We did not need to go further than this to secure administrative approval, though, some researchers at multi-campus systems may need to do so.

³ R1, baccalaureate colleges, and R3 are Carnegie classifications that refer to different types of academic institutions.