First-Year Intersections:

Professional Preparation and Civic Engagement Across Four New American Colleges and Universities (NACU) Campuses

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ABSTRACT

Four institutions hypothesized that civic engagement in first-year courses reinforces career readiness by helping students think critically, communicate effectively, and work well with diversity. We measured teamwork skills, the ability to synthesize and apply different perspectives, and the ability to express, listen to, and adapt ideas based on the perspective of others. We compared self-assessments to direct assessment of student-created artifacts and found a positive correlation that encourages further enquiry.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, career readiness, first-year students

INTRODUCTION

While there is evidence that a college degree helps with job prospects (Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019), there is still a mismatch between the soft skills employers want and the general perception of how a liberal arts education can fulfill that need (Carlson, 2023; Selingo, 2018). These challenges are paralleled by a "crisis of democracy" characterized by an increasing lack of willingness to engage with views different from our own (Dryzek et al., 2019). A survey by the National Association for Colleges and Employers (Gray, 2024) found that employers want to hire individuals who demonstrate precisely the skills that a liberal education promises (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2007), such as critical thinking, adaptability, problem-

solving, and collaboration. Yet, business leaders report that students are less prepared to work in real-world settings than ever before (AAC&U, 2018). Institutions have responded with experiential learning pedagogies that embed students in real-world settings. For this project, we studied a student's ability to express, listen to, and adapt ideas and messages based on the perspective of others, whether in a civic or campus context. These skills are fundamental to the development of deliberative democracy, which refers to making political decisions based on a fair discussion and exchange of information or perspectives (reviewed briefly in Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). Participating in out-of-class experiences in the community provides an opportunity to develop these skills in civic engagement, which we define as participating with a community partner or one's college

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campus for mutual benefit (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Dryzek, 2002). We measured engagement with diversity by asking students to reflect on how their own beliefs might be different from others and what can be learned from those differences. NACE (2021) tells us that employers are looking for employees who can think critically, communicate effectively, and who possess an intercultural fluency that would enable them to work well with diverse people. Therefore, we defined career readiness as a student's ability to think critically and to synthesize and apply different perspectives. As these characteristics closely align with our definition of civic engagement, we hypothesized that civic engagement reinforces career readiness. In other words, we explored how civic engagement can help develop first-year students' career skills by getting them to think about other perspectives. After all, experience alone may be insufficient for developing students' capacities. Self-reflection is highlighted as a practice that enables students to tackle complex problems in the workplace (Arnett, 2000; Konstam, 2014; Ortiz & MacDermott, 2018). Integrating diverse points of view while reflecting on their own perspectives also impacts their ability to participate effectively in democracy (Buchanan, 2022; Cramer & Toff, 2017; Gastil, 2008; Jennstal, 2019; Kuyper, 2018).

First-year experience (FYE) and first-year seminar (FYS) courses help students think about how they see themselves in relation to others, as they often have the express purpose of connecting students to each other, the instructor, and the campus community (Ishler, 2003; Neathery-Castro, 2004). Embedding civic engagement, even when the civic context is the campus, engages students in relational self-reflection that can promote the development of interpersonal skills, intercultural understanding, and teamwork skills in relation to their career goals (Anker et al., 2008). Career readiness in the first year also impacts retention and academic success (Picard, 2012; Simpson et al., 2019; Stebleton & Diamond, 2018). It supports students in connecting what they learn to career competencies. Researchers have also found value in connecting the classroom to effective participation in democracy (Dedrick et al., 2008).

Studies on civic engagement in FYS have approached the concept in various ways (Musil, 2009). Some study deliberative democracy, while others focus on how community-based learning promotes civic engagement through social justice (Schamber & Mahoney, 2008; Zlotkowski, 2002). Scholars have measured first-year civic engagement with social media (Usher II, 2018), as well as peer mentorship, experiential learning, and strong faculty-student relationships (Rendón, 2009). Few, however, analyze the connection to perceived career-readiness skill development. As Barber and King (2014) note, there is still much we do not know about "the developmental mechanisms that enable students to develop more adaptive ways of viewing the world, their roles as learners and citizens, and how they engage in healthy relationships with others" (p. 433). This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring student learning in first-year courses with a focus on civic engagement and professional skill development at four liberal arts institutions at a time when the value of a college degree is in question (Humphreys & Kelly, 2014; Khalid & Snyder, 2023).

COLLABORATING ACROSS FOUR INSTITUTIONS

In June 2019, representatives from four institutions belonging to the New American Colleges and Universities (NACU) consortium began this study. NACU is the only nationwide consortium of private, comprehensive colleges and universities dedicated to the purposeful integration of liberal education, professional studies, and

civic engagement. Faculty in designated first-year courses at these NACU campuses, which are located in the midwestern, southeastern, and northeastern parts of the country, implemented course activities and assessments to evaluate the impact of civic engagement experiences on students' perceptions of career-readiness during the fall 2019 and 2021 semesters. Student-created artifacts were assessed directly using a shared rubric, and the perceptions of student growth were evaluated using a pre-post survey (2019: n=138; 2021: n=169).

Though curricula differed at each institution, all courses required civic engagement activities meant to support first-year, first-semester students' transition to college. We embraced the campus as our primary civic context, so required activities involved finding a sense of belonging and becoming an effective campus citizen. Participating courses were chosen based on willingness of instructors to adopt the guidelines for this study and to develop assignments that catalyzed student engagement with campus resources, student organizations, and campus or social issues through a combination of campus workshops, campus events, and class discussions. Students responded to reflective prompts that addressed skills associated with career-readiness and their own participation in the campus community through in-class discussions and writing about social issues. For example, students at North Central College (Naperville, IL) actively participated in campus workshops on Title IX; diversity, equity, and inclusion; emotional intelligence; and career readiness. Not only did they reflect on each experience, but they also researched and offered constructive responses to some of them. Similarly, Queens University of Charlotte held Student Learning Development (SLD) workshops on deliberative dialogue in which a facilitator walked small groups through various activities about social issues. At the end, they wrote reflections about the

exercise and its utility for teaching campus citizenship in the first-year seminar. Students at Florida Southern College were in first-year courses connected to their learning communities. They analyzed and reflected on various social issues as part of the academic course content, including participating in multicultural short-film events and campus-wide lectures by guest speakers. Nazareth University had one first-year experience that required service learning and another that did not. In the latter, students participated in DEI events organized by the institution's division of Community and Belonging, designed specifically to raise awareness among first-year students. For the service learning, students worked with a community agency that provided after school programming in Rochester, NY.

METHODS

Quantitative Measures: Indirect and Direct Assessment

We developed a 21-question survey (Appendix 2) as a pre- and post-experience assessment. Students indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale to questions that addressed both the ways they valued engagement with others (e.g., "I benefit from interacting with people of different ethnic backgrounds.") and how they perceived their own skills, capacities, and tendencies (e.g., "I let my personal judgment block out a speaker's message." "I possess the necessary personal qualities to be successful in the career of my choice."). The change in perception on these items was evaluated in aggregate as we did not track individual students.

We also conducted direct assessments of student work to evaluate the extent to which these capacities were demonstrated. Our four-part rubric (Appendix 1) was developed from AAC&U VALUE rubrics (https://www.aacu.org/value/research) using four criteria, each scored from 1 to 4, for a total

of 16 points. The first, "civic communication," measured how well students communicated in civic/campus contexts, showing the ability to express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives. The second criterion, "diversity of communities and cultures," considered how well students reflected on their own attitudes and beliefs and on the value of diversity. The third criterion on "perspective taking" measured how well students could identify, explain, and synthesize perspectives when exploring a subject. The final criterion on the "student's position" measured how well the student could identify their own position (thesis or hypothesis) while acknowledging or considering (sometimes synthesizing) different sides of an issue.

The artifacts to which this rubric was applied varied from end-of-semester research papers to journal entries, reflective papers, and persuasive speeches about current events. To ensure inter-rater reliability when scoring, representatives from each institution assessed a random selection of student artifacts from every institution and participated in a calibration workshop in which artifacts were blind-coded and anonymized. Evaluators compared and discussed scores to normalize the application of the rubric. Each representative held another calibration workshop with the evaluators at their respective institutions before applying the rubric to the remaining artifacts. Half-point scores were assigned in situations where the two scorers disagreed by 1 point. In calibrating scores, we noticed meaningful learning reflected in student artifacts that did not fit neatly into the four rubric categories. This informed our decision to use the qualitative methods described below.

Qualitative Measures: In Vivo and Focused Coding

In the first stage of qualitative data analysis, two primary investigators and one research assistant used *in vivo* coding, also known as verbatim or natural coding. According to Saldaña (2021, p.106), this is appropriate for studies that "prioritize and honor the participant's voice." Further, *in vivo* coding is useful in youth educational studies because the participant's actual words enhance understanding of their worldview. All coders completed a practice coding session on the same document to align coding methods. We coded over 100 student-created artifacts (i.e., one group speech, three short essays, 15 research papers, 16 projects, 32 multicultural event reflection papers, and 36 learning journal entries). Following Saldaña's suggestion (2016), we created verbatim codes next to every line of data. One primary investigator checked a random sample of student artifacts to assure validity of *in vivo* coding conducted by the research assistant. After determining the participants' voices remained intact within initial data coding, we created a spreadsheet with each artifact's terms/phrases and collapsed spelling and tense variations. For example, *clarification* became *clarify* (e.g., more student examples of clarify), *coronavirus* became *COVID-19,* and *connects* was recoded to *connect.* Using a custom program, we ordered concepts by frequency and removed infrequent words such as *bounce, huge tattoo,* and *regular.*

We used focused (or "selective") coding for the second stage (Charmaz, 2014). In keeping with the evolving and iterative methodology that characterizes qualitative research, we used the rubric categories as sensitizing concepts, informing but not rigidly dictating our approach. Focusing on keywords that had 10 or more instances enabled us to narrow our list to a subset of 431 keywords. Coding informed by the rubric resulted in the omission of 94 keywords such as *address, around,* and *first.* The remaining 337 keywords were grouped into 50 categories based on similarities. For example, *challenge, difficult, problem,* and *struggle* were grouped into a category labeled *adversity.* We found the four rubric categories were sufficiently

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distributed across the three most frequently used keywords to enable use of those three keywords as a feasible data set for further analysis, with interpretations drawn from that data to be reasonably generalizable to the remaining data set. Those three key words were *people, different,* and *student.* Our goal was to explore student perspectives and learning beyond what was measured in the rubric, so a full line of content surrounding each keyword was extracted from the artifacts to contextualize it. Then, we assigned a relevant rubric category to each coded term.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results – Indirect Assessment
    Matching what employers reported as some of the most desirable skills (AAC&U, 2007), the mean scores for the perception of the importance of solving problems through collaboration and learning how to problem-solve both increased (Table 1). Additionally, students reported lower mean scores of personal bias by the end of the term. Of the students sampled, they were less likely to agree that their personal judgment blocked a speaker's message. Students also reported more confidence in their post-graduation plans and their understanding of professional responsibilities within their fields.
    In 2021, each institution designated certain courses as "control groups" where instructors offered no discussion of career and civic engagement skills. In the "experimental" sections, instructors emphasized career readiness and civic engagement skills explicitly. The same surveys were used in the first week of class and the last week of class in all sections. Surprisingly, there were no differences in the control and experimental groups' self-assessments in 2021. Overall, students in 2021 rated improvements in some of the same areas as 2019 (Table 2). Their written reflections provide a better understanding of their course-specific civic and career preparedness activities. Many

demonstrated a *belief in societal problems being solved through collaboration*. After watching a multicultural events short film and discussing it in class, one student wrote:

> These short films were a good reminder for myself, someone who deeply cares about social justice issues in the United States, of why these issues are of such great importance, and just how badly they impact my peers. I was aware of many of these issues, but seeing them displayed on the screen in the short film format gave weight to these stories, and reminded us students just how much progress needs to be made… It is a blessing to have continued intercultural experiences because I value being able to understand and communicate with people across the globe.

Another reflected on class content:

> This course raised awareness of social problems around the world and how as a community we can address these problems. A concept that we discussed in class that informed me of a social problem was emotions and stress. I previously had an understanding of the effect stress has on people but I wasn't aware of how much of a negative impact this has on human beings. This discussion in class gave me a better understanding of the impact stress can have and how much of a toll it can take on people.

They also discussed *real-life connections to content*. After a film and discussion, one wrote*:*

> I personally enjoyed this event a lot more than I expected to. It gave me a much better outlook on the differences between people that maybe I don't experience in my own everyday life that some people do. The film "Come" touched me a bit more personally than the others. I come from some Spanish

descent and I sometimes had different foods than what my friends would eat, making me uncomfortable about what my normal was.

Another reflected on a deliberative dialogue workshop on social issues:

This SLD [the abbreviation for the co-curricular workshop] was a lot about reflecting and acknowledging what values were useful throughout the semester. This contributed to a lot of our discussion being centered around sharing everyone's individual beliefs and ideas… I found myself throughout the event not sharing much but more just listening to everyone else. I found it comforting that many students struggle with many of the issues I do.

They frequently mentioned *learning to engage in problem-solving*. One reflected on class discussion:

I have learned that concepts such as critical thinking guidelines and observational learning can help communities understand and address the problem of racism in a better and different way. The critical thinking guidelines evaluate claims carefully without the tendency to attack all claims. The guidelines contain asking questions, defining terms, examining evidence, analyzing assumptions and biases… etc. and so much more to use reason and evidence rather than emotion. Using the guidelines when it comes to racism can help one see beyond the problem by not judging and promoting life skills using empathy and understanding."

Another reflected:

One of the first things we learned in class is the process of evaluating research. We were taught to think critically of the information we find—if it's recent enough, if it was done properly and ethically, if it's reliable and how reliable it is, what the source

was, if the researchers are willing to share evidence openly, what it does and doesn't directly answer, and what it lacks.

This quote exemplifies students disagreeing with the statement about *not having confidence in college and post-graduate plans*:

As this semester comes to a close, I believe that I have gotten my college career off to an incredible start, both academically and athletically. North Central College has provided me with amazing professors, coaches, and resources, with the sole purpose of setting me up for success in my adult life. I have not only been able to successfully identify who I am as a student, and the abilities that I have at my disposal, but I have also been able to recognize the flaws that I have, as well as what I need to work on.

Yet another noted that,

The most engaging and fun activities done through SLD events has [*sic*] to be learning how to write a goal. Being able to strategically send out what I want out of my college experience and then creating a path to follow so that it's achievable makes it much easier to grasp.

Pre- to post-test scores indicated that in 2019 students did not let their personal judgment block a speaker's message. There was a decrease in student mean scores in 2021; however, the results were not statistically significant. For example, this quote demonstrates that the *student's personal judgment* <u>did not</u> *block a speaker's message*:

I was filled with a lot of pride while listening to him [Craig Pittman] talk about how cool Florida is…Having lived here for the majority of my life I haven't had much experience with travel so Florida to me was ordinary and boring. However, my perspective

changed when I heard Pittman's presentation about his book.

Another student reflected:

> There are many SLDs I have attended in my freshman year because of Queens University and I tell you I loved every single one of them… My way of working things out was totally different than my peers and especially the adults in the room. But I loved it because we were able to talk about our ideas or opinions without anyone judging us or saying something rude. There are many ways you can have diverse perspectives and pull together others' points of view.

Students also demonstrated a nascent *understanding of professional responsibilities:*

> In class we learned about all the side effects of certain drugs and also what is under every category of the certain type of drug. Social workers, especially ones that do work with people who abuse drugs, should know the side effects of the drugs and the category of the drugs. This class and my future career as a social worker could go hand in hand together.

Another wrote, "No research is perfect, but I need to stay caught up with the best research possible to help my clients."

Overall, the aggregate survey responses showed that students perceived statistically significant positive gains over the course of their first semester in several areas under review, including approaches to problem-solving, seeing the value of collaboration in addressing societal challenges, making real-life connections to course content, understanding professional responsibilities, and building confidence in post-graduation plans. Further, they reported significant declines in interpretation bias, suggesting greater openness to learning from others but appeared not to link these soft skills to career preparation.

Quantitative Results – Direct Assessment

In 2019 (n=122) and in 2021 (n=116), we used the same rubric (Appendix 1) to assess student learning of these civic skills. Each artifact was evaluated by two scorers. Due to a lack of rubric norming in 2019, only data from 2021 are presented here (Figure 1) and reveal that first-year students in their first semester were developing capacities that are closely related to the skills that employers want. Overall, few artifacts scored 0 on any dimension of the rubric. Most scored at levels 1 and 2, demonstrating the ability to see and to learn from different perspectives as well as recognizing their value. They could express and listen to ideas and messages (sometimes adapting) based on others' perspectives. They could discuss, at least superficially, other perspectives, and acknowledge their value.

Civic Communication

In the civic communication category, a student acknowledged the value of socially appropriate communication but did not reflect any change in how they communicate: "My Psychology class has given me an understanding and tools to perfect my people skills in an appropriate manner for my future career." The maximum score (4) would show an ability to tailor their own communication to a specific audience. For example:

> One of the best strategies that I can use for communication during times like these is being a good listener. Making eye contact, nodding, and showing interest can go a long way when in a conversation with someone, particularly one where two differing opinions are clashing. This shows that you are paying attention to the opinions and feelings of the other which will make them feel heard and validated. Once they are finished speaking— be careful not to cut them off—it can be helpful to rephrase their statements to ensure you understood

them correctly. For example, starting your speaking with things like "So you think …right?" That way, there is nothing misinterpreted between the two people to cause an unnecessary divide. Simple things like this can make a big difference in the trajectory of the conversation.

Perspective-Taking

Many artifacts demonstrated the student's ability to understand other perspectives without elaborating how their own perspectives changed: "I find it very easy to empathize with other people; I am able to put myself in their shoes even if I've never experienced it." This acknowledgement of the diversity of perspectives while holding on to their own point of view scored a 1 on the rubric, while other artifacts highlighted their own attitude adjustment explicitly:

> Another one of these topics that allowed for this was the topic containing the *learning from others* perspective. The way that I evaluated the diverse perspectives and other people's viewpoints was that I took them all in and thought about why they saw things the way that they did. I think that it is very important for people to understand one another and not just have the set mindset that they are right and anything else is wrong. I do feel that I was able to empathize with others and understand the way that they might see certain situations.

Diversity of Communities and Cultures

The following quote acknowledges difference of experiences for a score of 1: "They were all different in their own ways but showed different cultural ideas that are seen every single day and how different life is between different people, especially based on simply where they come from." Many students noted that differences in opinions can come from having different backgrounds, but

few reflected on how their own perspectives were formed (required to score a 3). But some began acknowledging the value of learning from others:

> In the conversations we got to hear how diverse perspectives were present when I talked about things that only happen to me because of the cultural backgrounds but I got to hear other people's ideas that I was not familiar with because that is what they were taught… Sometimes just by listening to others even if it is not what I personally think is right can be helpful to have more of an open-minded perspective and maybe even change perspective.

Student's Position

The following example scored a 1:
> She then wishes that her mother would understand that she wants to try American Thanksgiving food but she soon realizes from her teacher that she doesn't need to try to be different and eat other things just because the people around her don't come from the same background.

To score a 3, the student must demonstrate an understanding of the complexity of an issue. What we often saw, instead, was that students were demonstrating exposure to concepts they had never encountered before. These nascent realizations open the door for future growth:

> Within social psychology, we talked the concept of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the belief that our own culture, nation, or religion is superior to others. This is a universal idea, and promotes a lot of the racism that occurs today in schools, workplaces, etc. We can decrease ethnocentrism by working together to reach mutual goals and increasing cooperation.

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Qualitative Results

Although quantitative results indicate that students were beginning to develop key aspects of civic engagement that connect to the workplace skills we highlight, the qualitative results show how students thought about these skills and topics. Of the 261 coded terms discussed earlier, 3% addressed civic communication, 13% addressed perspective taking, 37% touched on diversity of communities and cultures, and 47% related to students' understanding of their own positionality. Some meaningful learning was not captured by the rubric. For instance, reacting to an event in which they were exposed to the role of parents in perpetuating racist attitudes, one student wrote:

> To see how the White girls treated her, especially at such a young age to have the ideas that they did, made me question the way people raise their children. It makes me upset to see that people are still pushing these ideals onto their children, making the racist cycle continue, which I want to make sure that I don't allow my children to think in that way.

This excerpt aligns with rubric criteria because there is an acknowledgement that the student's view differs from other cultures or communities, but it is difficult to score within that rubric because it does not directly align with the full description of any of the scoring summaries/guidance (see Appendix 1). The rubric did not capture students' recognition of discrimination and inequity in society, how that made them feel, and the ways that reflection led to plans for being agents of positive change in society. As further exemplified below, these were significant elements that would have gone unnoticed without qualitative analysis. Reflecting on a campus film event that showed racial microaggressions and more overt acts of racism, one student wrote, "It made me sad that this is a real thing that people go through daily just because of the way they grow up

and the things they do." Another student who attended the same event wrote, "It made me really upset and angry that people could and would treat another person like this." Signaling the impact this event had on their interest in civic/campus engagement, one student wrote, "I will be attending more events by the multicultural student counsel and I am excited to see what they bring to the table next time."

Within the broad theme of social justice, the most prevalent subcategory that emerged was for creating inclusive, safe spaces on campus. Some reflections critiqued campus facilities, as represented by this student advocating for improved residence hall conditions:

> Young individuals who tend to be under increased levels of stress such as students need a stable environment to thrive and pursue their goals, and they cannot adequately do this when their mental and physical health is constantly diminished by their living situation.

Students also reflected on their perceptions of institutional policies and strategies: "I have found that the college focuses the ideal of belonging more towards freshmen because this demographic of students tends to be more vulnerable than the upperclassmen." Another subcategory was advocacy for diversity training for professional preparation. In sharing takeaways from an interview with an elementary school teacher, one student emphasized how critical diversity training is for their career goals: "I want my classroom to be a safe space for all students." They clarified this meant "accepting each student and their ways of learning" and that "students should feel confident to come to you for anything they might need." While these statements reflect points along the "student's position" and "diversity of cultures" criteria, the rubric does not capture the student's recognition of the importance of diversity training to achieving their professional goals.

INSIGHTS AND LIMITATIONS

When the 2021 data is compared to 2019, students in 2021 reported less confidence in college and post-graduate plans, less improvement in letting personal judgment block a speaker's message, and fewer reported learning better through real-life connections to content. Perhaps this is due, in part, to a post-pandemic world, as students may feel less optimistic about the future in general. First-year students may have been uniquely impacted on a profound emotional level (Booker et al., 2022; Potts, 2021). Our data aligns with surveys where students reported not feeling college ready (Ezarik, 2021). While direct assessment and qualitative analysis support the increased career preparation associated with these experiences, students didn't perceive it in the same way. This was unsurprising as these course-based experiences for first semester college students were not meant to address specific career paths. Student surveys showed little to no change in whether they believed they possessed the necessary personal qualities (such as integrity and a sense of responsibility) to be successful in the career of their choice. We found no statistically significant change in how important students believed good personal skills in a job might be vis-à-vis job-specific or technical skills. More surprisingly, students reported no significant change regarding the extent to which they possessed the communication skills to be successful in their careers, nor did they feel more certain about succeeding in their careers at the end of their first semesters than at the beginning, despite a positive change in how prepared they felt to embark on their college or post-graduate plans. The striking similarity between control and experiment groups suggests that we cannot attribute this growth to any specific intervention in first-year classes alone when relying only on quantitative data.

However, using both quantitative and qualitative methods reveals that courses that emphasized a particular area of learning were effective in their efforts to promote growth in that area. For instance, students scored highest for perspective-taking and diversity when service learning was required in the course. Students required to engage in greater academic exposition and research scored higher on position-taking. Although at first blush this may not be surprising, it does validate the effectiveness of course design and pedagogical practices of the participating instructors, providing useful grounding for further research and practice.

CONCLUSION

This study is unique in that it examines the impact of civic engagement activities for first-year students at four different liberal arts institutions. Every campus required campus engagement and discussed the relationship between this and professional skill development. We see similarities in the way that deliberate civic engagement can impact the skills and capacities that students develop. There is fertile ground for further study and this collaborative project provides a unique opportunity to better understand this important topic. While there is support for the role of a liberal arts education and career preparedness (Stebleton et al., 2020), there is not a significant body of research examining student learning related to professional skill development and civic engagement *together* in FYE/FYS courses in a liberal arts setting. The purpose of our study was to explore how civic engagement in a liberal arts structured FYE/FYS course impacts how students perceive their own development of career preparation skills.

This study revealed that students perceived some development of career-related skills, though they might not connect the skills to career-readiness. Some courses and assignments were more effective in

demonstrating the criteria for evaluation, but it remains unclear what contributed to this. As outlined by Young and Hopp (2014) and further evidenced in this study, FYE/FYS courses come in many different forms. None of these were designed explicitly for developing career-readiness skills in first-year students. As a result, our research explored the generalized role of civic engagement experiences in the development of career-related skills. With this limitation in mind, we still see remarkable growth in how students perceive and emphasize the ways that they interact with others, even though the students may not make the connection to career preparedness on their own.

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FOOTNOTES

IRB # 00011168 Queens University of Charlotte
IRB # 2019-36 North Central College
IRB # FA2019-01 Nazareth University (formerly College)
IRB # 2019-20-008 Florida Southern College

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TABLES

Table 1

2019 Student Self-Reported Learning Results

Criteria	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test *SD*	Post-test Mean	Post-test *SD*	*t*	*P*
Belief in societal problems being solved through collaboration	4.38	.72	4.63	.57	-2.97	.003**
Knowing how to approach supervisors	4.02	.85	4.3	.69	-2.4	.018**
Learning through real-life connections to content	4.31	.74	4.46	.64	-1.87	.062
Learning to engage in problem-solving	4.02	.74	4.25	.76	-8.27	.000**
Not having confidence in college and post-graduate plans	2.53	.88	2.23	1.03	2.34	.020*
Student's personal judgment blocks a speaker's message	2.33	.80	2.10	.70	2.39	.023*
Understanding of professional responsibilities	3.68	.86	3.96	.81	-2.67	.008**

Note. Results from four institutions (n=155) highlighting areas where students perceived a change in their own learning and perspectives over the course of the semester.
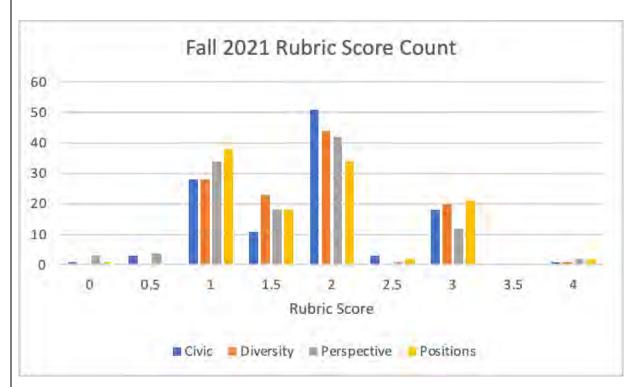
Table 2

2021 Student Self-Reported Learning Results

Criteria	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	t	P
Belief in societal problems being solved through collaboration	4.1	0.74	4.28	0.67	-2.82	.005**
Knowing how to approach supervisors	3.98	0.77	4.2	0.75	-2.7	.007**
Learning through real-life connections to content	4.61	.68	4.37	.64	-1.46	.884
Learning to engage in problem-solving	3.48	0.75	3.97	0.83	-6.05	.001**
Not having confidence in college and post-graduate plans	2.53	.88	2.23	1.03	2.34	.020*
Student's personal judgment blocks a speaker's message	2.35	.82	2.26	.82	.909	.364
Understanding of professional responsibilities	3.68	0.89	3.83	0.87	-1.67	.048*

Note. Results from four institutions (n=169) highlighting areas where students perceived a change in their own learning and perspectives over the course of the semester.

Figure 1

Fall 2021 Rubric Results

Note. Rubric scores represent values (n=116) assigned to student work by assessors using the NACU Project Rubric (Appendix 1). Scores with a 0.5 were assigned only when the evaluation by more than one assessor consistently differed by just a single point on the rubric.

Appendix 1

NACU Project Rubric

Criteria	Milestone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1	Pt
Civic Communication Based on AAC&U civic engagement VALUE rubric	Tailors communication strategies to effectively express, listen, and adapt to others to establish relationships to further civic action (college campus can suffice as civic)	Effectively communicates in civic/campus context, showing ability to do <u>all</u> of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.	Communicates in civic/campus context, showing ability to do <u>more than one</u> of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.	Communicates in civic context, showing ability to do <u>one</u> of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.	
Diversity of Communities and Cultures Based on AAC&U civic engagement VALUE rubric	Demonstrates evidence of adjustment in own attitudes and beliefs because of working within and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes others' engagement with diversity.	Reflects on how own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. Discusses what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures thoroughly.	Demonstrates that own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. Discusses what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures superficially.	Expresses attitudes and beliefs as an individual, from a one-sided view. Does not discuss what can be learned from diversity of communities.	
Perspective Taking Based on AAC&U global learning VALUE rubric	Evaluates and applies diverse perspectives to complex subjects in the face of multiple and even conflicting positions (i.e. cultural, disciplinary, ethical.)	Synthesizes other perspectives (such as cultural, disciplinary, or ethical) when investigating subjects.	Identifies and explains multiple perspectives (such as cultural, disciplinary, or ethical) when exploring subjects.	Identifies multiple perspectives while maintaining a value preference for own positioning (such as cultural, disciplinary, or ethical).	
Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) Based on AAC&U critical thinking VALUE rubric	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is not developed or does not acknowledge different sides of an issue.	
				TOTAL (Max 16):	

Appendix 1: NACU Project Rubric. These are aligned with NACE Competencies in Critical Thinking, Oral/Written Communication, and Global/Intercultural Fluency.

Appendix 2

Pre-Post Test/21-question Survey

In order to assess the effectiveness of this program, we are asking you to provide information about your experiences and opinions about your education. Please respond as honestly as possible relying on your <u>current feelings</u> about the particular issues raised. All responses will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the analysis of the data. All parts of the survey should be completed only on a voluntary basis. Completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate. Completion of this survey will have <u>no impact on your grade</u> for this class. Thank you so much for your time and efforts.

Section A: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement below. Please place a check in the box that most closely describes your response.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I learn more about my school subjects when connections with real life situations are made.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
2. I have a realistic understanding of the daily responsibilities involved in professional jobs in which I am interested in.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
3. I benefit from interacting with people of different ethnic backgrounds.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
4. I believe that if everyone works together, many of society's problems can be solved.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
5. I possess the necessary personal qualities (e.g., responsibility, manners, integrity, etc.) to be successful in the career of my choice.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
6. I usually feel uncomfortable initiating conversations with people that I do not know.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
7. I let my personal judgment block out a speaker's message.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
8. I possess the necessary oral and written communication skills to be successful in the career of my choice.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

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	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. I listen to people whose opinions I disagree with to better understand their perspective.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
10. I think that people should find time to contribute to their community.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
11. I know how to approach a supervisor, teacher, or boss to discuss an important matter.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
12. I have learned how to engage in problem-solving within my first-year college courses.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
13. There is no relation between my real-life experiences and what I learn in school.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
14. I believe in standing up for what is right, regardless of what other people think.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
15. I have very little control over the things that happen to me.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
16. I am uncertain of what is required to succeed in the career that I wish to pursue.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
17. I can explore possible career interests within my college curriculum.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
18. The things I learn in school are not applicable to my life outside school.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
19. Participating in civic engagement in my community is important.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
20. Having good personal skills (e.g.,promptness,responsibility, integrity, etc.) in a job is not as important as having good job-specific or technical skills (e.g., computer literacy).	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
21. I do not feel well prepared to embark upon my college or post-graduate plans.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑