Introduction

This assessment report summarizes the process and findings from an assessment of the two learning objectives for the Civic Engagement Core requirement. It is supplemented with SCU student responses on civic engagement-related measures gathered from national surveys from 2015. Taken together, these sources offer a perspective about students' knowledge, attitudes, and actions related to civic engagement, and invite discussion of the degree to which students are achieving the goals we have set out through the core and what we might do to further their learning.

The Assessment Process

In 2015-16, the Office of Assessment asked faculty teaching civic engagement courses in the core to gather student work related to the two Civic Engagement learning objectives. Student work was collected from a random sample of students from 11 of the 17 Civic Engagement courses taught during winter quarter, 2016. Faculty teaching the courses identified the assignments or exam questions providing the clearest evidence for student learning with respect to the first learning objective: *[Students will] Critically evaluate and express reasoned opinions about the role of public organizations (governmental, non governmental, multilateral, or international) in civic life through both oral and written work.*

The second learning objective for Civic Engagement states: *[Students will] Analyze and evaluate civic issues by engaging in active and collaborative learning with peers and others through one or more of the following: a) working cooperatively with other students in class; b) actual observation and participation in the contemporary ramifications of various types of civic life or civic discourse; or c) working with civic organizations beyond the walls of the University.* This learning objective focuses on learning processes that would advance civic engagement outcomes. In order to assess this learning objective, faculty were asked to provide syllabi and assignments that would allow the assessment team to determine how faculty designed instructional materials or assignments to enable outcomes like active and collaborative learning. The group of faculty conducting the assessment contributed to the design of a checklist that two raters used as they reviewed syllabi and assignments submitted by the faculty teaching these courses.

Ten faculty members participated in a scoring session in the summer of 2016, evaluating work from a total of 54 randomly selected students from 11 different Civic Engagement Core courses. After a norming session and discussion, two raters independently reviewed and rated all materials using a rubric developed by the Office of Assessment and the Faculty Core Committee (see Appendix A). Just over half (52 percent) of all scores were in complete agreement and 43 percent varied by just one point. In three cases in which the two raters differed by two points, a third rater independently scored the student work to reconcile the differences. Inter-rater reliability was calculated for LO1 using AgreeStat® and simple ordinal weights. Agreement across raters is considered moderate: Gwet's AC2 was 0.74.

What we learned

Learning objective 1

The first learning objective asks that students critically evaluate and express reasoned opinions about the role of public organizations (governmental, non-governmental, multilateral, or international) in written and oral communication. Just over half (54 percent) of the student work was scored as proficient or highly proficient for the first learning objective. Another 39 percent of the work was rated as approaching proficiency, and 7 percent of the work was evaluated as not proficient.

Figure 1: Percent of Rubric Scores for Learning Objective 1

1 Not proficient
2 Approaches proficiency
3 Proficient
4 Exceeds proficiency
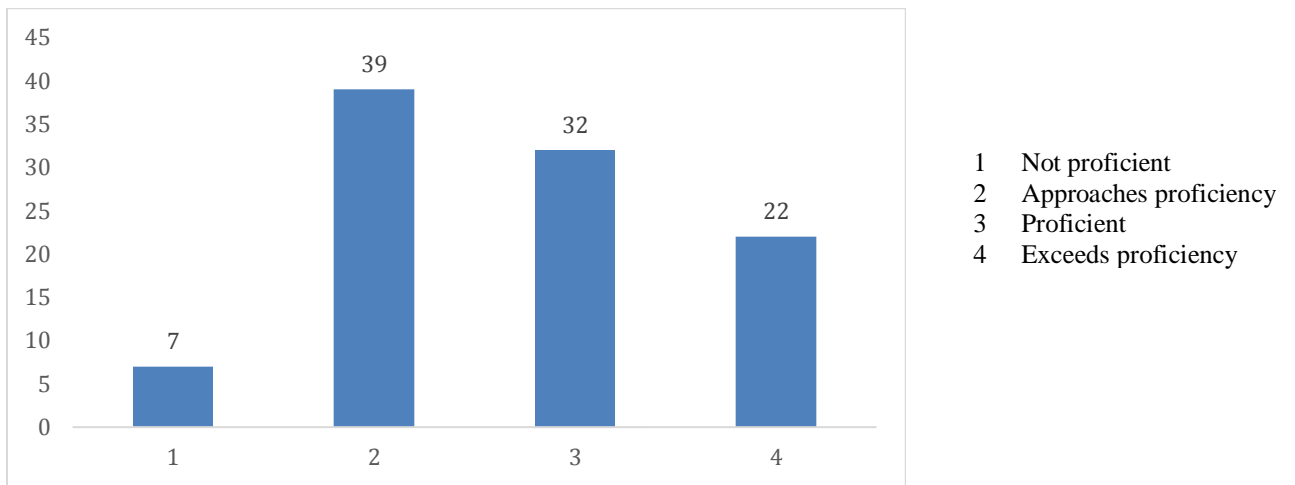
Learning objective 2

The faculty doing the assessment examined syllabi and assignments to determine the extent to which students were analyzing and evaluating civic issues by engaging in active and collaborative learning through class activities, or their observation of or involvement with civic activities organizations beyond the university. See Appendix B for the checklist used to evaluate LO 2.

Generally, the 11 courses reviewed included two or three assignments or requirements that asked students to evaluate civic issues by engaging in active and/or collaborative learning. On average, these requirements constituted between 30-40 percent of students' grade, indicating that they were a significant part of the course.

All 11 courses provided active learning opportunities for students to complete individually (e.g., student leads a presentation on civic life, issues, or institutions). Additionally, all courses included collaborative assignments, group projects, or other course activities with peers that address issues of civic life or institutions. In half of the courses, students also had assignments in which they observed or participated in civic life or civic discourse or to work with a civic organization or group within SCU (e.g. Center for Sustainability) or outside of SCU. Since the learning objective calls for one or more of these active or collaborative learning activities to be included, it is reasonable to include that these courses are meeting the second learning objective.

Faculty on the assessment team additionally examined course activities and assignments for evidence that students had opportunities to develop civic skills. All courses provided opportunities for students to consider alternative viewpoints. Additionally, deliberation skills, skills in negotiation or mediation of conflict, or the creation of innovative and cooperative solutions to social problems were encouraged in half of the courses.

Conclusions about Core Civic Engagement Learning

The Civic Engagement learning objectives prioritize critical analysis and expression of reasoned opinions, as well as the development of civic skills fundamental to democratic engagement. The rubric scores from the first learning objective indicate that about half the student work was judged as meeting our learning goals.

The finding that for LO1, 39 percent of work approached, but did not achieve, proficiency is worthy of additional discussion among faculty teaching in this area. A review of assignments designed to address this learning objective is an important first step: did the assignments ask the students to engage in the critical analysis and expression of reasoned opinion called for by the learning objective? A number of Core courses that fulfill the Civic Engagement requirement also meet other Core learning requirements (e.g., ELSJ) or major assignments across a variety of disciplines. It can be challenging to design assignments that serve multiple requirements and learning objectives. Faculty may want to share their approaches to assignment design in a follow-up workshop or discussion.

The review of the syllabi and assignments shows the courses in this area routinely include active and collaborative learning opportunities that can help students develop their civic skills. We currently do not have a way of assessing the actual development of these skills from the materials available, but students are having experiences that can develop these learning outcomes.

Civic Engagement-Related Survey Data

To complement the direct assessment of the civic engagement core, we also examined archived survey data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the HERI College Senior Survey.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and HERI/CIRP

Every three years, SCU participates in NSSE, gathering information from students about their experiences and engagement in various educational activities. The NSSE was last administered to both first-year students and seniors in Spring 2015. SCU also participates in the HERI/CIRP survey. This survey focuses on a slightly different set of questions about students' experiences in their academic and co-curricular activities, as well as their attitudes and behaviors. The CIRP was last administered to students just prior to entering SCU and to seniors in Spring 2015. Students completed both the NSSE and CIRP online.

Participants

About 35 percent of first-year students and graduating seniors (N=395 and 393, respectively) completed the NSSE. The demographics of survey completers are generally representative of the student population at SCU, with the exception of gender (fewer males completed the survey than females). About 40 percent (N=481) of graduating seniors completed the CIRP. Of those, 64 percent were female. Unlike the NSSE, we did not have CIRP data from first year students for the

items used in this analysis. (See Appendix C for the demographic breakdown of students who completed the 2015 NSSE and CIRP surveys.)

Students' responses to civic engagement items

There are several items from NSSE and CIRP that address students' perceptions of the emphasis given to civic-related knowledge or activities or students' forms of civic engagement.

The CIRP includes sets of items that form three constructs relating to civic engagement outcomes: Civic Awareness, Civic Engagement, and Leadership. Using national data of student scores, CIRP places student responses into one of three levels: low, average, or high. These constructs are only measured for seniors.
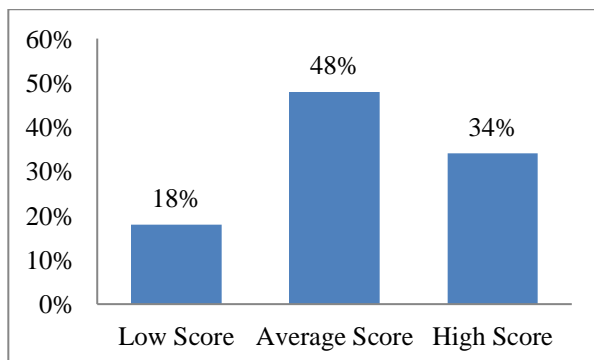
The Civic Awareness construct is composed of items that ask students about their understanding of civic engagement issues, such as "Compared to when you first entered this college, how would you now describe your understanding of national issues." This is a measure that we could expect would correlate with Core learning outcomes, among other learning experiences. Data show that most SCU students score in the average range. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Distribution of Senior Students' Scores on Civic Awareness
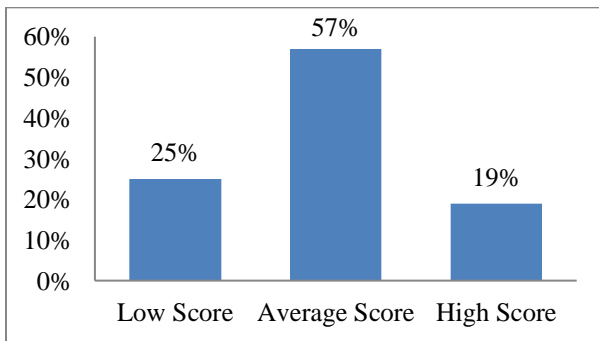

The Civic Engagement construct is more action-oriented, and is composed of items that ask students about their involvement in civic engagement activities such as, "Since entering college, how often have you helped raise money for a cause or campaign." While most still fall within the average range, one-third of students have high scores for Civic Engagement. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: Distribution of Senior Students' Scores on Civic Engagement

Leadership is a less directly emphasized outcome of the Civic Engagement Core requirement, but one that SCU prioritizes at the institutional level. The Leadership construct in CIRP is composed of items that ask students about their leadership participation across different groups or situations in college, such as, "Since entering college, I have participated in leadership training." As can be seen in Figure 4, the majority of SCU seniors have leadership scores that fall in the average range.

Figure 4: Distribution of Senior Students' Scores on Leadership
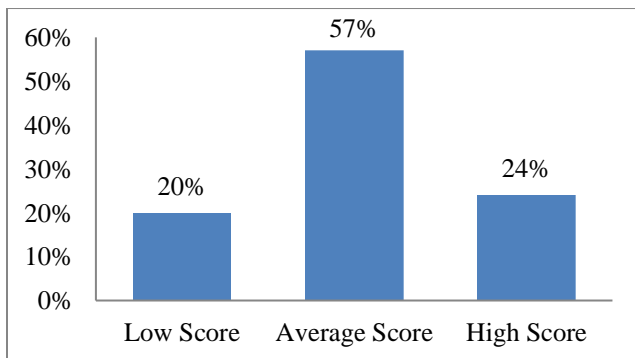
In NSSE, students were asked how much the institution emphasizes attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues. The perceptions of first-year students and seniors is similar—almost two-thirds of the students view SCU as encouraging this "quite a bit" or "very much." (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Institutional emphasis on attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues
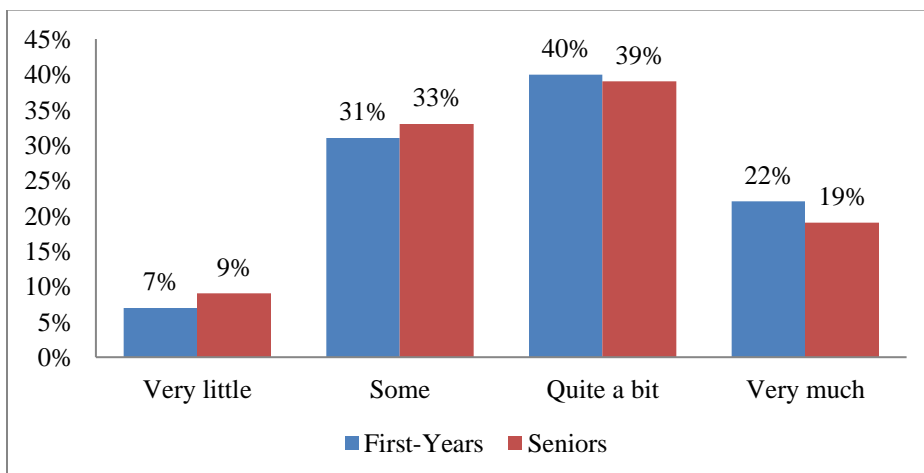
Students also reported on how much their experience at SCU contributed to their development in the area of being an informed citizen. Seniors reported that their university experience contributed "quite a bit" or "very much" to their development as an informed and active citizen at a higher rate than first year students. This difference was statistically significant $\chi^2(3) = 12.97$, $p < .01$

(See Figure 6). Still we recognize room for growth in that over one-third of all students feel the university has contributed "very little" or only "some" to their development in this area.

Figure 6: Frequency of Perceived Gains in Being an Informed and Active Citizen by Year
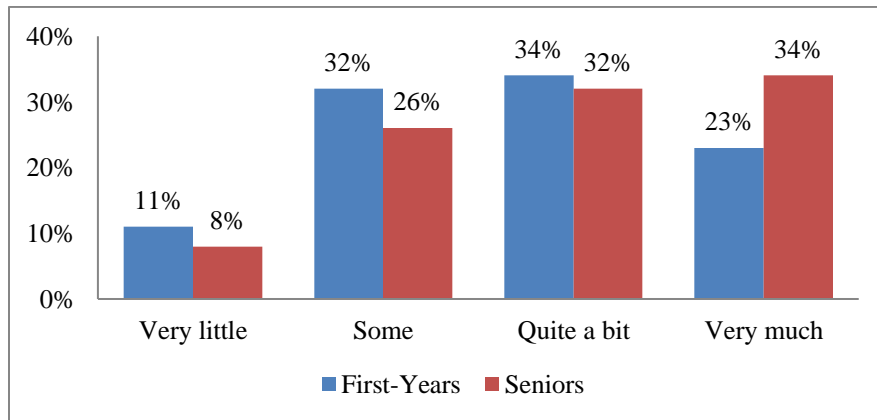
Volunteering or community service is another expression of civic engagement. The NSSE asks students to report whether or not they volunteer or perform community service regularly. Fifty-two percent of SCU seniors reported that they volunteer compared to 35 percent of first year students. The CIRP asks a similar question: *how often* in the past year have students performed volunteer or community service work? Phrased this way, 13 percent of senior students state they do not volunteer at all, 68 percent state they occasionally volunteer, and 20 percent report they frequently volunteer.

Finally, voting is an important expression of civic engagement. CIRP includes a question asking students if they have voted in a national election. In 2015, 70 percent of seniors reported that they voted. However, self-reports of voting are often inflated. Data from another source—the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) launched in 2013, monitors students' actual voting rates. Of the 74.2 percent of SCU undergraduate and graduate students registered to vote in the 2012 presidential election, 46.1 percent actually voted. Although we can't distinguish between the proportion of undergraduate and graduate students who voted, older students tend to vote more often that younger students. The voting rates of SCU students in the 2014 midterm elections was much lower, just 19.3 percent.

Conclusion

The first purpose of conducting assessments of student learning is to discover how well students meet the goals we set for them in the Core and as a university more generally. The second purpose of assessment is to develop strategies for developing student learning further, especially if the evidence points in that direction.

The findings from the Core Civic Engagement assessment indicate that faculty include pedagogic strategies that support civic engagement learning outcomes, but that only just over half of student work achieves is proficient or better at critically evaluating and expressing reasoned opinions about the role of public organizations in civic life. An additional 39 percent of the work is rated as approaching proficiency.

The data from national surveys confirms that—even for seniors—there are opportunities for students to further develop their civic awareness and engage more civically. Most seniors score in

the average range on the civic awareness, civic engagement, and leadership constructs, with many fewer scoring as "high." While seniors report higher gains in being an active and informed citizen in comparison to first year students, it is important to ask if we are satisfied with this level of growth and attainment. Are these average scores and low voting rates realizing the university's vision "to educate *citizens and leaders* of competence, conscience, and compassion and cultivate knowledge and faith to build a more humane, just, and sustainable world (emphasis added)." Should students perceive that the university places greater value on their participation in events dealing with important civic issues? How might we promote greater civic engagement through the Core, other courses, and co-curricular activities? Does it make sense to think of engagement not just as a skill but as a disposition (or attitude) that could be reinforced more effectively? For example, are there appropriate steps for strengthening students' enthusiasm for participation (e.g., to vote, join civic organizations, and the like) without indoctrinating students to participate on behalf of particular political goals?

As the faculty considers strategies for improving civic learning and engagement in the Core, it may especially want to consider how to strengthen students' abilities to evaluate and reason about the role of civic organizations (learning objective 1.1). The assessment found considerable room for improvement in this area and these skills would seem to be learned better through the curriculum rather than the co-curriculum. Faculty should review the assignments designed to address this learning objective with several questions in mind. Can assignments be designed more clearly for students to demonstrate abilities to evaluate and express reasoned opinions about civic organizations? Can readings and lesson plans better develop these capacities? Can students be motivated to develop these skills more effectively by appreciating their importance for practicing effective leadership in their civic, professional, and personal lives?

Appendix A: Rubric for Learning Objective 1

Civic Engagement Assessment Rubric -- Learning Objective 1.1

Learning goals & rubric source	Objective	Highly proficient-4	Proficient-3	Approaching proficiency-2	Not proficient-1	Score
Civic Life, Communication, Critical Thinking. (rubric draws upon Critical Thinking and Written/Oral Communication AAC&U rubrics) Civic Life: The roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and institutions in societies and in the world. .	1.1 Critically evaluate and express reasoned opinions about the role of public organizations (governmental, non governmental, multilateral, or international) in civic life through both oral and written work. *Note: Given the definition of the learning goal, we will include references to citizens/stakeholders in the assessment.*	Presents thoughtfully developed, credible, and reasoned opinions/ analysis of the role of public organizations in civic life. Central message synthesizes appropriate, relevant, and compelling content and is communicated with clarity and fluency. *Content should focus on roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and institutions in the world.*	Presents consistent and plausible opinions/analysis of the role of public organizations in civic life. Central message includes appropriate and relevant content and is communicated clearly. *Content should focus on roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and institutions in the world.*	Presents fairly consistent and plausible opinions/analysis of the role of public organizations in civic life. Central message includes some appropriate and relevant content and/or is communicated somewhat clearly. *Content should focus on roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and institutions in the world.*	Presents opinions/analysis of the role of public organizations in civic life that are inconsistent, implausible, or significantly underdeveloped. Central message includes little or no appropriate and relevant content and is not communicated clearly. *Content should focus on roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and institutions in the world.*	

Note: If the content of the student work does not address the learning objective at all, score the work a "zero."

Appendix B: Assessment checklist for Learning Objective 2

Civic Engagement LO 1.2 Checklist

1. Syllabus or assignment description has evidence of the following, check or "X" all that apply:

	Active learning opportunity for students completed individually (e.g., student leads a presentation on civic life, issues, or institutions)
	Collaborative assignment(s), group projects or other course activities with peers that address issues of civic life or institutions
	Assignments or course activity that involves students' observation or participation in civic life or civic discourse (e.g., analysis of City Council meeting or transcripts of candidate speeches or public records on a civic matter)
	Assignment or course activity that requires students to work with a civic organization or group within SCU (e.g. Center for Sustainability) or outside of SCU

2. Do any of the course activities or assignments provide evidence that students will develop skills in the following? Check or "X" all that apply:

	deliberation skills
	considering alternative viewpoints
	negotiating or mediating conflict skills
	creating innovative and cooperative solutions to social problems

3. How many different assignments or course requirements require students to evaluate civic issues by engaging in active and/or collaborative learning?

	0
	1
	2
	3
	More than 3

4. What percentage of a student's grade *in total* is devoted to the kinds of assignments or course requirements that contribute to LO 1.2? (e.g., presentations, collaborative learning, engagement with civic organizations, etc.)

	0
	1-10%
	11-20%
	21-30%
	31-40%
	41-50%
	More than 50%

5. Select this box below if:

	there is not enough information/evidence provided to come to any conclusions about LO 1.2

Appendix C.

Table 1. NSSE Participant Demographics

	First-years	Seniors
Gender		
Female	62%	65%
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	28%	14%
African American	4%	3%
Hispanic/Latino	17%	19%
White	46%	46%
Not specified	5%	18%
Major Cluster		
Business	24%	29%
Engineering	23%	12%
Arts and Humanities	8%	14%
Math and Natural Sciences	23%	18%
Social Sciences	10%	27%
Undeclared	12%	0%

Table 2. CIRP Participant Demographics

	Seniors
Gender	
Female	64%
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian	19%
African American	3%
Hispanic/Latino	15%
White	51%
Not specified	12%
Major Cluster	
Business	26%
Engineering	11%
Arts and Humanities	17%
Math and Natural Sciences	19%
Social Sciences	25%