Civic Engagement

Supplemental Chapter

for

Invitation to Public Speaking
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*Civic Engagement Wrap-up*
Section I: Civic Engagement in Public Discourse

Introduction: What Is Civic Engagement?

As you grow, your family values and beliefs are what influence your perceptions. When the time arrives for you to head off to college, you carry with you many of those values and beliefs. An important and critical part of our society is for an individual to become an active and informed part of the community. As you evolve and become more informed, your perspectives may change and your actions will reflect that change. Your actions are shaped by the campus community, but you still engage with others around you and work to make change or stand up for what you believe in. Action can be on a larger scale, taking part in the community itself. Regardless of how you choose to engage with the surrounding community, the challenge is to engage.

“Democratic societies rely on the active and informed participation of their citizens,” notes the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement at the University of Washington. It has always been considered a privilege in the United States to take part in an election and have your voice heard. In recent years, it seems as though our citizens have become apathetic both at the national and local level. A new generation shows the promise of engaging with local issues, while considering a larger entity—the world.

There is no single definition for the term civic engagement; however, the following two definitions may help you better understand the concept:

1. Individual and collective actions are designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms—from individual volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, such as working with others in a community to solve a problem or interacting with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of activities, such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official, or voting. (Pew Charitable Trusts)

2. A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself 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. (American Democracy Project, Introduction, p. xxvi)
Brainstorming Civically Engaged Speech Topics

1. Recall a time when you have witnessed an injustice. What emotions did it raise in you? How did you react? Was intervention an option? What did you wish would change about the situation? If this were a reoccurring problem, what, if anything, could have been done in your community to resolve this problem? Is this topic one which your classmates would benefit from knowing about? How could focusing on this topic work to change that injustice?

2. What are some local environmental or energy concerns in your community? Is there disagreement on how to designate, protect, and better utilize and conserve local water, open space, parks, and wind or solar power? What are the key arguments involved in these disagreements? Do you feel your classmates could become more informed advocates and voters if your topic centered on a local environmental or energy issue?

3. Consider the local economy in your community. Locally owned businesses directly benefit the local population economically and environmentally. How many stores, which you frequent, are locally owned? Are there any farmer’s markets in your community that offer locally grown seasonal products? Could delivering a speech on an aspect of your local food economy help your classmates to become more empowered over the power of their dollar?

4. Does the size of your community seem to be growing and expanding, remaining stable, or shrinking? What physical or emotional clues do you see in your community that enable you to justify your answer to the prior question? What attitudes and actions do you believe your community should take toward growth? How could a speech on community growth help your classmates to understand their own attitudes about the future of their community?

5. Consider your rights and privileges as a student at your school. Have you witnessed an instance where you felt a student’s voice was being intentionally ignored? If you have been part of such a situation, might it be possible that your fellow students have as well? How could a speech on a particular student issue motivate your classmates to become advocates for student rights?

6. Think about the relationship between your school and the greater community. Do both entities view each other with respect? Are there instances of unjustified stereotypes? Do any local laws or ordinances exist that seem unfair to their entity? How could you help your classmates to understand their role in either compliance or helping to change any local ordinances that might be unfair to either part of the community?

7. Recall a time when you were surprised to learn about a little-known right or privilege of which you were entitled. How did that right or privilege benefit you? What feelings did it evoke in you? Do you feel that a majority of your classmates could benefit from knowing about this right or privilege?

8. How many of your neighbors do you know? Is your community (your classroom, cafeteria, library, dormitory, local neighborhood, workplace, etc.) an environment where people take time to learn each other’s names? Are there attitudes, spaces, or groups that you avoid within your own community? How do these aspects of your neighborhood affect you on a daily basis? Are there any topics you could explore that could improve the quality of life and sense of community for you and your neighbors?
**Section II: Fostering Civic Engagement through Narrative Forms**

**What Is the Narrative Form in Public Discourse?**

As Cindy L. Griffin illuminates throughout the text, narratives are a powerful form of communication that create connections between speakers and audiences. The author also notes that narratives help personalize important points, challenge audiences to think in new ways, and create strong emotional responses.

The use of narrative is a common communicative practice across cultures. In U.S. culture, orators and rhetoricians rely on narrative forms in political, religious, educational, and professional contexts in order to incite responses and in many cases to call audiences to action. Narratives can be a useful springboard for encouraging audience members to become engaged in broader issues of importance.

Consider the following examples:

- Have you been a student in a class where an instructor’s effective use of narrative allowed you to access course material on a more meaningful level, thus prompting you to become more interested in a global, interactive approach to a topic and/or discipline?
- Have you witnessed discourse in a free speech zone on your campus where personal narratives or anecdotes were used to provide strong support for a particular cause or persuasive agenda?
- Have you interacted with spiritual leaders in your lifetime who rely on narratives to engage theological perspectives and encourage religious or spiritual involvement and participation?
- Have politicians used narratives in debates or campaign speeches that cause you to react or interest you in a particular political issue?

These are only a sample of ways that orators use narratives to engage audiences and motivate audience members toward a particular course of action. The following list of activities can be used as individual exercises or within small cooperative learning groups to further your understanding of the ways in which narratives can serve as part of public discourse that promotes and enhances civic engagement.

1. As you plan for your next speech in a public speaking course or in another public speaking context, brainstorm ways in which you could insert narratives that would help connect you with your audience and encourage them to begin thinking actively about your topic. If your speech is designed to call your audience to action, consider telling a compelling story that shows your investment in the cause so that your audience can begin to personalize the issue.
2. During a local or national election period, track the use of narratives among political candidates so that you can assess ways in which candidates use narrative as a rhetorical strategy to promote their platform issues. Discuss your assessments with peers, colleagues, friends, and family so that larger conversations may be held regarding significant political issues and the ways in which issues are presented in public forums.

3. The next time you find yourself in a conflicting interpersonal exchange, consider re-approaching the conflict from the perspective of narrative. Use storytelling to convey emotions and key issues, and encourage other parties to express issues through the use of narratives as well. Once resolution is reached, discuss how using narrative helped you achieve a peaceful resolution and changed the dynamics of the disagreement.

4. Encourage your instructors to use narratives in their pedagogical practices. Affirm their teaching strategies by acknowledging how narrative forms deepen your understanding of course content. Suggest ways to integrate service-learning or experiential models of education into the curriculum so that students can begin to connect course material with the “stories” of the world outside the classroom.

5. Stay up to date with current events so that you may be a contributing voice in your community and in personal or social groups who help others become aware of major issues that affect citizens at the local, national, and global levels.

6. Seek out ways to be active in your community as a mentor to younger students. Using your storytelling skills, offer your time as a tutor or as a volunteer with a youth mentoring program so that young people can be encouraged and guided through critical decisions and life stages.

Creating Narrative Comparisons

When composing a narrative, it is important to consider the ways your audience can relate to your story, particularly if your story recognizes a rare event that took place in your life. This helps create an engaging story as well as reducing your potential public speaking anxiety. One way to approach narrative speechwriting is to first lay out a list of comparisons to which most of your audience members can relate. This list then becomes a helpful list from which to create imagery devices such as metaphors, similes, idioms, etc.

For example, imagine you are recreating a story about a skydiving experience. This might be a story of great excitement, bravery, and conquering a lifelong fear. However, you must assume that a very small percentage of your audience have experienced a similar event. To help them understand such an emotion, you will need to compare this experience to something they are likely to have experienced—perhaps riding on a rollercoaster, moving out on their own, starting the first day of high school, etc.

Complete the following exercise before writing your narrative as a means of brainstorming helpful comparisons that you might want to include in your story.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Narrative</th>
<th>Helpful Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main emotion of narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles of people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory experiences:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smells</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile senses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tastes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral or lesson learned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Story Mapping

Story mapping can be a great help when it comes to writing a narrative speech. Try filling out a chart similar to the following before creating any text in paragraph form.

Create categories and subcategories to chart the many different directions of your story. This process often helps visual learners see what is involved in the story and develops the appropriate framework before writing sentences and paragraphs.

Another option is to create a story map centering around the five senses to get a sense of all the details happening during a particular event. The following illustrates this type of story map.
Section III: Civic Engagement Reconsidered

Audience Centeredness

What does it really mean to be audience-centered? Every time you have the opportunity to speak in public you must look to your audience for inspiration. Your audience will aid you in the speaking process in many ways. Considering your particular audience will tell you, among other things:

- What topic to choose.
- What sources to use.
- What form your speech should take.
- How to order your points.
- What terminology to explain more fully.
- What visual aid to use.
- How much extemporaneousness to display.

Your audience is a valuable tool for speech preparation. If you spend a great deal of time thinking of your speech topic, your speech will probably go badly. If you prepare a great visual aid and practice over and over but never think about your audience, your speech will not likely be successful. If you did all of that and you loved the speech but your audience never heard a word, what is the point of speaking in public? Public speaking is very much about the audience. To be a successful speaker, ask yourself:

- Who are you speaking to?
- Is it a voluntary audience?
- Will they have some interest in your speech topic?
- What level of knowledge will they possess regarding this topic?
- What points will need more explanation?
- What level of formality will they expect?
- How much time will you have for dialogue?

Audience centeredness does not stop here but continues through the delivery of the speech, where you are committed more to helping the audience understand than finishing your speech in the way you planned. Through the dialogue and/or question and answer session, your audience is still your top priority. We use to conceive of public speaking as a one-way mode of communication. I talk, you listen. Now we know that it is a much more dynamic process and that the audience is every bit as important as the speaker. With this knowledge you will be a much more effective speaker.
Service Learning and Civic Engagement

During a fall semester I had the good fortune to enroll in a Basic Public Speaking course. I call it good fortune now but at the time I certainly did not feel that way. I had waited several semesters to take the class most students take as freshman. I decided that since it was a requirement for graduation I had better not put it off any longer. I thought, it cannot be that bad. However, my outlook changed drastically. The professor wasted no time stressing that this course was a service-learning course. At first I was uncertain what that meant, but she went on to explain that we would be required to complete at least 20 hours of service in the community as a partial requirement for the course. I could not believe that I had to take a course with this sort of ridiculous requirement. I mean, who has 20 extra hours in 16 weeks? Certainly not me; with work and 18 credits, I was busy enough. However, I decided to stay in the class because I needed the credits to graduate.

About one week into the class the professor invited representatives from the agencies we would be working with to come in and give a short presentation. I listened to each and chose the one that seemed the most flexible and the least painful. After signing a contract where I swore to complete at least 20 hours of meaningful service for the agency, I began my work at the Family Center where I tutored children who attended the afterschool program. On the first day, which came about 8 weeks into the semester, because I had procrastinated so much, I was still not convinced that this was going to be a useful experience. I decided that I needed to go. Quitting was not an option, so I decided to make the best of it. I put my best foot forward and continued to do that for seven other days as I completed more than the minimum hours of required service. In that time I began to see classroom principles come to life. Concepts that were just theory in the classroom were real at my agency. I could identify them in my interactions with the children, which allowed me to know that they were more than just conjecture. In addition, I was able to remember these things more easily because they were no longer just words on the page in my notebook.

That was not the end of the benefits I reaped from my service-learning experience. Another, and perhaps far more important, thing that I learned in that organization was the immense need of those children for the services the agency provided. I was taken aback at the sheer number of children crowded into that small space. I also became aware of the shortage of volunteers. I could not believe that all of this was going on in the community where I lived without my even noticing it. Because I loved working with those children, I decided to stay with the organization and continue volunteering my time after the semester was over. Since taking that class, which has changed my life, I have been involved with service learning in some way every semester. I have taken training through the Office of Service Learning and Volunteer Programs, served as a service-learning assistant, and taken several other service-learning classes. I have attended graduate school where I focused on service learning, and this year I will have the opportunity to teach three sections of Introduction to Public Speaking with service learning as a partial requirement just like the course I took that changed my life.
Finding the Right Fit: Community Partners

Civic engagement is a mind, body, and voice activity. For it to occur you must be present both mentally and physically. There are many great community partners, but not all will be right for you. Here are questions to consider when choosing a community partner.

- **Location:** Will I be able to get there on time whenever I am scheduled to serve?
- **Hours:** Will the hours they have available fit into my schedule?
- **Clientele:** Do they serve a demographic that I am interested in working with?
- **Structure:** Will this be a highly structured service placement? Do I require structure to be productive?

Your instructor has gone to great lengths to ensure that you have a variety of quality service-learning options. Whether civic engagement occurs or not is up to you. Please treat community partners with care. They will come to depend upon your work and greatly appreciate your time and effort. So, go have fun, learn much, and utilize your mind, body, and voice in your university without walls. It will be well worth it.

Ways to Be Engaged Every Day

Civic engagement does not always occur during some monumental speech or nerve-racking process. Sometimes it happens in small ways, in our day-to-day decisions. Here are some ideas about how you can be an engaged citizen every day.

- Use alternative modes of transportation (walk, take a bus, ride your bike, or carpool)
- Bring your own coffee cup to the coffee shop
- Sign a petition
- Listen to a protestor
- Have conversations
- Buy locally
- Seek out a farmer’s market
- Bring your own grocery bags
- Turn off lights
- Consider buying a hybrid car
- Do product research
- Attend a political rally
- Pick a speech topic this semester that will raise awareness
- Volunteer your time
- Become knowledgeable about community needs
- Become knowledgeable about community decision-making processes
- Vote
- Use a refillable water bottle
- Recycle
- Buy secondhand clothing
Values Survey

When listening to speeches centered around controversial topics, audience members have a tendency to do much more hearing than listening. Less critical audience members often superficially categorize the content of a speech. This categorization often utilizes popular political opinion and labels that make it easy to reduce the content into dismissible stereotypes. However, did you ever stop to think that most people—regardless of political, religious, or ethnic background—actually share many values? Even though many democratic political campaigns often highlight one or two major actions, most competitors share common values. Often the difference lies in the ways these values are prioritized. To see just how difficult it is to prioritize important human values, try the following survey.

Values Survey

Name: ________________________________________________________

Rank the following values with 1 being the most important and 20 being the least important.

_____ A comfortable life  ____ Mature love
_____ An exciting life   ____ National security
_____ A sense of accomplishment  ____ Pleasure
_____ A world at peace  ____ Self-respect
_____ A world of beauty  ____ Social recognition
_____ Equality  ____ True friendship
_____ Family security  ____ Personal health
_____ Freedom  ____ Wisdom
_____ Happiness  ____ Wealth
_____ Justice  ____ Living in a pleasant community
When You Might Need an Invitational Discussion

Imagine that you are home for break. It is Sunday morning and you decide to attend church with your parents. You have been attending the same small church for most of your life and know many of the people who attend. When you arrive you make a beeline for the coffee and stand by yourself while your parents join a nearby group of friends. While you pour cream in your coffee, you overhear a gentleman in your parents’ group make a racial joke. This joke is followed by chuckles and laughs, and the conversation rapidly moves on. At first, you don’t think much of this; after all, the joke was very mild and may not even be offensive to some. However, you did notice your parents joining in the laughter, and after thinking about it you decide this action was wrong and you are going to talk to your parents on the ride home after church. The more you think about it, the more nervous you become. You know that they will say, “It was nothing, just a harmless joke.” You convince yourself to have the conversation anyway because you know that it is not usually the big things that make the world a better place but the small things that people do and say daily. As you think about how to raise the issue with your parents, you realize that you do not know how to talk with them about their behavior without causing a confrontation.

Have you ever been in this kind of situation? You know that something should be said; you know a conversation should take place, but you don’t have the skills to follow through. In Invitation to Public Speaking you learn about invitational speaking. This type of speaking is ideal for controversial topics, situations, and conversations, especially those that would benefit from a broadening of opinions, an opening of conversation, and a sharing of ideas. Invitational speaking is, at first, contrary to your normal pattern of conversation and may be somewhat difficult to grasp, but once you understand and can practice it you will possess a tool to help you facilitate these tough conversations that should not be left unspoken.

Invitational Speech Outline

This outline is meant to be a first step in helping you to bring an invitational discussion to life. Use it to begin placing your thoughts in a constructive order that will promote a sense of equality, value, and self-determination.

Name: ___________________________________________________________
Speech topic: _______________________________________________________ 
Are you discussing an issue or position? ______________________________ 
Describe what body posture you will be using to nonverbally convey a sense of open-mindedness: ________________________________________________________________
Name three language choices (actual words) you will use to promote a sense of equality, value, and self-determination:

_________________________________________
_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Why is this issue or position really important to you? *(personal feelings are encouraged here)*

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What aspects of your life (age, race, sex, gender, class, preferences) influence your interest or position regarding this topic? Reflect on this and please name as many as you can.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

*Body:* Research is required (passion and intellect need to join here). Review the factors, opinions, legislations, etc. surrounding this issue or position. Please give a complete source citation and a two to three sentence summary of what information the source provided you.

1. Citation:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Summary:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. Citation:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Summary:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Create three main points to introduce your audience to this issue and/or position. Remember to keep this simple and short to leave room for group discussion.

1. Main point:

2. Main point:

3. Main point:

Create an invitation for discussion:
Discussion: List 3 open-ended questions you will use for prompting discussion if the audience members do not voluntarily respond?

1. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

\[\text{▼▼▼}\]

Civic Engagement Wrap-up

In closing, we hope the brief writings and exercises in this chapter help in your quest to become a more civically engaged individual, newly trained in the art of public speaking. Once you have decided to open the door to civic engagement, seeing all the pressing needs of your community can be daunting. Remember, small acts such as reading the local newspaper, getting to know your neighbors, and making use of your local rights and privileges serve to keep you actively engaged in your community. Start with your everyday life first. Observe how small actions can create a tighter web of community. And always, realize that your voice is a vibrant part of the civic fabric that weaves all of our democratic ideals together.

Best of luck in your public speaking endeavors!

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