The Personal is Political: Fostering a Culture of Student Political Engagement

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SESSION OUTLINE

- Introductions
- Poll - Perceptions about Student Affairs and Student Political Engagement
- Overview and Highlights of SSAO and Student Political Engagement Study
- Small Group Discussion
- Large Group Check-in/ Debrief
- W.I.G. (What I Got) Reflection Time / Q&A / Wrap Up

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How do we align campus cultures and practices to support democratic engagement?

(Saltmarsh, Hartley & Clayton, 2009)
ARE STUDENTS ON MY CAMPUS POLITICALLY AWARE AND ENGAGED?

COLLEGE RANKINGS BY POLITICAL LEANING

Based on students’ answers from 376 schools to the survey question: “Politically, are you left-wing, Democrat, middle, Republican, right-wing?”

**TOP 10 MOST CONSERVATIVE**
1. Hillsdale College, MI
2. Thomas Aquinas College, CA
3. Texas A&M University, TX
4. Grove City College, PA
5. US Air Force Academy, CO
6. University of Dallas, TX
7. US Merchant Marine Academy, NY
8. Hampden-Sydney College, VA
9. Brigham Young University, UT
10. Angelo State University, TX

**TOP 10 MOST LIBERAL**
1. Macalester College, MN
2. Warren Wilson College, NC
3. New College of Florida, FL
4. Eugene Lang College, NY
5. Sarah Lawrence College, NY
6. Hampshire College, MA
7. Bard College, NY
8. University of Puget Sound, WA
9. Pitzer College, CA
10. Prescott College, AZ

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DO MY POLITICAL BELIEFS INFORM MY WORK WITH STUDENTS?

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DO I FEEL COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING POLITICS WITH STUDENTS?

Can We Talk?
The Rise of Rude, Nasty, Stubborn Politics

Daniel M. Shea  Morris P. Fiorina

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IS STUDENT POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT A PRIORITY FOR MY DEPARTMENT?

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**Student Political Engagement in the Co-Curriculum:**
*Understanding the Role of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs)*

**Guiding Question:**
How do we align campus cultures and practices to support democratic engagement?

*(Saltmarsh, Hartley & Clayton, 2009)*

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do SSAO define and enact their roles on campus?
   a. Do SSAO see student civic and political development as part of their job?

2. What formal and informal influences do SSAO identify as informing their views about their work?

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STUDY RATIONALE

- Need for examination of the role of SSAO in supporting student political engagement
- We know about service-learning, volunteerism, and philanthropy (Astin & Sax, 1998; Jacoby, 1996; Jacoby, 2003; Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Kuh, 2009)
- What about political engagement (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011)

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STUDY PURPOSE

- Understand the **processes** that influence SSAOs seeking to foster a culture of student political engagement.

- **Student Political Engagement defined:** “activities intended to **influence** social and political institutions, beliefs, or **practices** and to affect **processes** and **policies** related to **community welfare** (Adapted from Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003).

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STUDY DESIGN

Procedures
- Sampling: **Purposeful**
  - 21 SSAOs
  - Community college, regional comprehensive, liberal arts, land-grants, MSIs
  - Geographically diverse
- Data sources: 60-minute interviews w/participants; PR and strategic materials collected about programs and services
- Data analysis: thematic coding

Trustworthiness Techniques
- Cross-checking of codes, reviewing case materials in relation to codes for triangulating data, member-checking, using a peer debriefer, reviewing a summary of findings w/participants
  (Creswell, 2007; 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Jones et al., 2006, 2014)

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INITIAL FINDINGS

- Differing definitions of political engagement
- Difficulties encountered in assessing student political development and involvement
- Importance of political neutrality
- “Rules for Engagement” for SSAOs
- Tension between being an administrator & being a political agent

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SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Is it important to cultivate a campus culture that supports student political engagement?

2. On your campus, where and from whom do you receive messages about how to interact with students on political issues?

3. Do aspects of your identity inform how you approach issues surrounding student political engagement?

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IMPLICATIONS

- Need to foster conversations about politics and model healthy democratic practices to students
- Yet most campuses fail to do this and students are left on their own
- Leadership is crucial for fostering student political engagement but it doesn’t have to be top-down
- Political self-reflexivity is critical
- More training and research on student political engagement is needed to understand the processes and environments that affect SSAOs and students

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QUESTION PROMPTS

1. What are three steps you could take to assess the climate for political engagement at your institution?

2. Who are two colleagues that might be interested in supporting efforts to foster student political engagement?

3. What’s one obstacle you foresee in creating a climate of student political engagement on campus?

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CHECK - IN
W.I.G. OUT — WHAT I GOT

- What are you feeling right now? Why?
- What, if anything, will you bring back to your campus?
- What remaining questions do you have?
- What have we missed?
RESOURCES

American Democracy Project’s Political Engagement Project
http://www.aascu.org/programs/adt/PEP/

The Washington Center
http://www.twc.edu/

Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship
http://www.augsburg.edu/sabo/

The Kettering Foundation
http://kettering.org/

Imagining America
http://imaginingamerica.org

Mobilize.org
http://www.mobilize.org/

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