

**Qualitative Assessment of Student Understanding of Responsible Citizenship  
(2013-2014)**

**Sample of Pre/Post Responses to Question – *What does civic engagement mean to you?***

**Overview:**

Based upon review of campus wide assessments of civic engagement (2004 and 2009) and review of results from the Civic Engagement Survey completed annually by SMSU graduating seniors, it was clear that students conceptualizations of civic engagement vary widely, with many students indicating only a minimal understanding of the notion. With this in mind, along with an intent to identify an efficient and not time intensive means of measuring change in students understanding of “civic engagement”, the committee determined to make use of a one question qualitative item “*What does civic engagement mean to you?*” in several LEP 400 course and a few lower division courses from Spring 2013-Fall 2014. This qualitative data is currently being analyzed, including coding for common themes in pre/post responses, running a word count to measure how much a students are able to describe in a 10-minute timeframe, and finally developing a Likert scale coding system for identified themes for future pre/post assessment of students’ understanding of the nature of civic engagement.

Found below is data from ONE sample course, LEP 400, taught in Spring 2013 and involving junior and senior level students. This course was title Self-as-Citizen and made use of a text that summarized the research of Harvard social psychologist, Ellen Lange on “mindfulness” as it relates creative thinking and problem solving processes. Students read and discussed this body of research, along with working in groups to address a social problem of their choosing (e.g., sex trafficking, inhumane treatment of animals, water quality in rural, impoverished regions of the world, access to rural healthcare, driving while fatigued). The project included an information literacy component covered by SMSU librarians and required students to make use of at least four different forms of civic engagement to address their particular social problem (e.g., sign a petition, volunteer, assume an advocacy role of some sort, contact government leaders, write a letter to the editor).

**General Findings:**

At post-test (i.e., at the end of a semester long course taught in a traditional in-class, seminar format), students were able to speak at much greater length about the topic and were able to describe their understanding in a more differentiated versus global or general manner. Specifically, their understanding of civic engagement was not limited to one or two forms (e.g. volunteering and voting), but to broader variety of forms. In addition, at post-test, students were able to note concrete examples of various types of civic engagement and speak to attitudes, values and skills that characterize being a “engaged citizen” .

## Question Protocol:

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Professor of Course: \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTIONS: For the next ten (10) minutes, please respond to the following question with the first thoughts that come to mind. Do not worry about being grammatically correct. Simply write in a free form way. (If you are not in a group setting, please time yourself, no longer writing after ten minutes.) Thank you!

**QUESTION: What does civic engagement mean to you?**

### PRE- TEST – CIVIC ENGAGEMENT QUESTION-Spring 2013

#### Olson LEP 400 Spring 2013 CE? (Pre)

- Well, considering I'm not exactly sure what "civically engaged" means, I would have to say that what being civically engaged means to me is that...well, I don't know. I guess to be civically engaged is to care about and actually do something about global and local issues. I personally will listen and hear about it but I don't really do anything about it, except maybe learn about it more or try to understand it better.
- I'm not exactly sure what civic engagement means but if I had to guess I would say it means helping in the community around you whether it's helping an elderly lady with her groceries or helping clean the ditches; anything in that order.
- I don't feel like I can define "civically engaged" well enough to give a good answer. At the moment, I would say it means to have an active role in the community and playing a part in helping to better those around you. Going along with that definition, my personal level of civil engagement is low.
- Being civically engaged means involving yourself civically. It can range from doing a lot of things. Taking part in your community, picking litter off the ground, raising money to feed the hungry, and being involved in politics are all examples of actions of being civically engaged. It is involving, engaging in, and caring for our society and humanity as a whole.
- Participating in conversations during a class period, being open-minded towards other's opinions to see how many different opinions there are out there other than yours, discussing a certain topic without purposely hurting someone's feelings, willing to learn new information in order to better understand your major.
- Civically engaged means understanding the individual's values and norms, finding significant connection with other individuals, society and the world. Also, as being part of the society, helping community and society to make it a better place for all.

- It means a lot to me because it kept me alert of what others are doing around the world. It makes people be together and know each other.
- Civic engagement, by definition, means working to make a difference in the civic life and our communities. So what do I do? For the first part I stay involved in the community by participating in pen pals with middle school kids. I also am part of a Christian organization that meets at the high school and middle school campuses. I find myself always looking for an opportunity to be civically engaged. During the Christmas holiday I spend some time helping at a mattress giveaway for families that have children sleeping on the floor.
- It means to me that I am willing to be/get involved in the community I live in. To help others and myself understand people and their views. The will to put aside negative ideas and work with others to be more positive in the thought of improving our society, and making your community and our world a healthier environment.
- To me, being civically engaged means to be actively involved in the community such that our own actions benefit everyone locally and/or globally and make people aware of the current issues and find a solution to these issues.
- To be civically engaged to me means going out of your way to help others in need. You are not thinking about how it will look on your resume. You are helping the world become a better place because you want to. The only benefit you get from it is the enjoyment that you help others. It does not have to be anything big. You could do anything from visiting the elderly to packaging meals to send overseas. If you are helping others who you do not know, to make them feel better, you are being civically involved.
- When I hear civically engaged, I think of just being engaged, aware, and involved in event happening around you.
- Being civically engaged means voicing your opinion if you feel that individuals and government are wrong.
- Always on the lookout for someone who can use my help, guidance, skills, opinions, rational thought, a listening ear, anything to help a person on an as needed basis. I am an Eagle Scout and assistant scoutmaster and I am going to be a personal trainer.
- Being civically engaged means to be active in your community socially and physically whether if it's helping in schools, centers, shelters just simply means being involved and helping others in your community.
- As far as I'm concerned, I am a very creative person, get along with everyone whom I live with. I always do the things the way I want without any doubt.
- Being civically engaged means being involved in things to help local businesses or organizations. I think that by being on the volunteer fire department is an example of being civically engaged.

## POST- TEST – CIVIC ENGAGEMENT QUESTION-Spring 2013

### Olson LEP 400 Spring 2013 CE (Post)

- Issues that arise/occur currently in your area, national or/and international. Some examples are animal cruelty, animal hoarding, not enough awareness on pet therapy, obesity, food hunger, children concerns/nutrition, lack of healthy water, businesses taking our money, waste of energy, etc. Civic engagement is similar to environmental issues but doesn't have to be environmental. Engage in interactions with others to make someone's life better whether it's a person or animal. Caring, fixing, loving, support, donate, adopt, import/export, civic rights, civic duties, helping. Keep the world here, be alert/aware of others who need help.
- Civic engagement means mindfully being aware of the issues around you and being able to distinguish what is important to you. After becoming aware, civic engagement means taking action. This action can be done to somehow make a difference and better the world in some way, whether big or small. The civic engagement I always think of is volunteering, also donating. Civic engagement is something everyone can get involved with. Civic engagement is making a difference in the world.
- Civic engagement means stepping outside of your normal comfort zone and doing things to make yourself along with others better people. It is about finding out who you really are and if you want to stay or change in some way. There are many issues in the world that need attention. We can help in some of the smallest ways possible. It can be as simple as signing a petition or as complex as going to Africa and feeding the children. By civically engaging ourselves, we are able to help others even if we don't believe we are making a change. If we stop thinking of ourselves and start thinking of others, we will be better off.
- It means acting and doing something for a cause. We all have beliefs that things should change. In order for that change to happen, we need to stay active. Get out there in the world and do something positive that will change the world, a little at a time. Let the world know what we can do to work as a team and help make the world a better place to live in. I believe the civic engaging part should be something we need to keep up with. It doesn't change overnight. We need patience and determination to see changes happening. Giving up is always an easy option, but if we don't have values that we don't want to work hard for, changes won't happen. Sometimes, we have to be the leader in order for changes to start happening.
- Civic engagement means to me that one is involved in their house, community, country and world. Any of these could fall under civic engagement. It is the desire to make changes for the better in whatever way possible. It is also selfless actions, putting others before you, and aiding those in need. In the future I want to have a strong family and be involved with a church. Those are the main ways I can see myself being civically engaged, by being a good example to those around me, and raising children that are good examples for those they are around.
- Civic engagement to me is the process of thinking mindfully to the daily activities and social issues in our society. It is about putting some effort back to the society, as being thankful of how society has shaped us to be the civil citizen. Civic engagement is being creative and authentic of who we are and how we present to the rest of the world. It is also exploring

ourselves as we move along life and giving back to the society and world as a whole. Civic engagement is helping the humanity in a small or big way so that our future generation can have more opportunity and better lives.

- To me, civic engagement means being civically engaged via an organization or individually. To be engaged in helping others, making people aware of issues in our society/world. Actively participating in events or projects that help spread awareness of the issue or work towards eradicating it. While there are organizations that are civically engaged on a bigger scale, it is possible to be civically engaged by doing simple things like playing “Free Rice,” bake sale/fundraising and donating money to charity, free education, free services to public. Civic engagement is something that unites a group of people for a good cause, whether it be to end hunger, or to end abuse or end poverty or what not. Civic engagement is GREAT! It makes us great citizens of the world.
- Civic engagement means a lot to me because I have learned a lot from the project I did and from my classmates. If I had never taken this class, I would not have known what civic engagement meant.
- Activism, checking out perspectives, see where people are coming from, what their thoughts, dreams and ambitions are. It means standing up for your morals, values, beliefs but also respecting others as long as they’re not displaying violent or unethical ways to obtain their goals. I think it should be noted the civic engagement website on SMSU tends to lean liberal. I think something like this should be balanced and if politics involved should have information from both parties, an issue such as prolife vs. prochoice should have organizations from both sides. The main thing people should be able to make a decision after seeing and hearing both sides of an issue. Civic engagement is a good thing, makes you aware and better informed. Feels good to state your opinion and point of view either to others or to legislations.
- Civic engagement covers such a broad area. To me personally it means helping others in your community, state, nation, and world. Giving of yourself to show the meaning of connection and care. We all have our own special talents and gifts that can shower over into our lives and other’s and make this world a happier and safer place. We don’t need to conquer the world. Think of all the little things that can show appreciation and make a difference. Engage, immerse, jump in and do something with the life you have been given. Langer and Loeb (?) both spoke well on ideas that we can work with.
- It means to put yourself out there to help in any form, shape, means, or way, in what you believe needs to be changed, or promoted, or cared about, or made aware, doing it in a way you’re passionate about, and it makes a difference in a community, at school, in a state, in the nation, across nations, any way or means to experience a difference. It includes getting out there and doing something, making it known what you care about, finding ways to execute what you care about and doing it, not just once but for life and the more you do it the more new things you care about will come your way and the cycle repeats or someone new is inspired to do the same. It is aware of good wills and deeds to try and make a difference and it makes people feel good.
- To me civic engagement means several things. First and foremost, it means becoming aware of situations or events that are happening in the world. After becoming aware, a person should take steps and develop goals to help change a situation in the world that bothers them. There

are many forms of civic engagement that even the busiest of people can fit into their life. Freerice.org is a wonderful example of something small that a person can do to make a difference in the world. Civic engagement means that a person contributes themselves to a cause, for the best of humanity. This can be small or big. It can be as simple as asking questions, wondering why something is the way it is. Civic engagement requires a person to give back to the community. As humans civic engagement is the best way we can give everyone an opportunity to get “a slice of the good life.”

- Civic engagement means (to me) to be active in the community, to be helping out even in the most simple way. Volunteering to help out at an animal shelter or to give lessons of some sort to children for free when you have free time. To be civically engaged is just to help out, to inform yourself and others about something going on in your own community or just nationally that affects everyone. To inform and to help out in some way is to be civically engaged. It can mean a great deal to one person or a lot of people. But for me certain issues like animals are the most important.
- Civic engagement means helping out in the community and trying to make the world a better place. It could be anything from trying to stop animal cruelty to addressing the world hunger problem. It could be something as simple as writing a letter to something along the lines of signing a petition or protesting. Civic engagement is engaging in the community and civically trying to improve any aspects you feel need to be addressed. It also includes trying to help educate people about the problem at hand. Better awareness will lead to better efforts to help.
- In my three years at SMSU, I have never known about the civic engagement center. Now it seems to be part of everyone’s activities. I am glad to be in this class to hear about civic engagement. So, I am aware of these activities from now on. It helps individuals and it helps the community around us.
- Civic engagement to me means getting involved within the society. This could mean anything from volunteering to cleaning ditches to working at a post office. Anything that gets a person involved in the local businesses. It can also mean helping for a specific cause like abortion, child obesity, hunger, and many other things. By being civically engaged a person is aware or mindful of all the amazing things they can do to help this region, state, and even country to be the best that they can be. If I knew how easy it was to go online and sign petitions and join clubs that help change different ongoing issues. I would have done it a long time ago. By being civically engaged we are contributing our thought to make this world a better place. We not only get to voice our opinion but we get to see we are not the ones who think that the issue needs more thought and push behind it to change the ongoing problems.