Academic Performance Enhanced By High School Civic Engagement

High School Students Required To Perform Community Service
22 Percentage Points More Likely To Graduate College

Academic Benefits of Service Opportunities Higher For Male Students

College Park, Md. – High school students who are involved in volunteering, school required community service, and student government are more likely to graduate from college and achieve greater progress in reading, math, and science, according to two new studies released by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland.

The two new CIRCLE Working Papers (“Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress” and “Do Gender and Ethnicity Affect Civic Engagement and Academic Progress”) by Professors Alberto Davila and Marie T. Mora offer a detailed look at the impact of participation in civic engagement activities during high school on the academic performance of youth. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 Davila and Mora found that those high school students who participated in the following civic activities had higher academic achievement on average than those who didn’t:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic Engagement Activity</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Required Community Service</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Community Service</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, civic engagement activities appear to have long-term academic benefits. Davila and Mora found that students who participated in school required community service were 22 percentage points more likely to graduate from college than those who did not. Both Working Papers and the fact sheet can be found at [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).
“We used the NELS data for a number of reasons: it is the most suitable to analyze the questions from our study; it consists of a relatively young age of the cohorts; it offers a large nationally-representative sample size, and includes detailed questionnaires,” said Davila and Mora. “Our findings suggest that the impact of high school students participating in civic activities appears to be positive both in the short-term, increasing high school academic performance, and in the longer term, raising the odds of college graduation.”

The researchers also found that service opportunities while academically beneficial for both male and female students, produced greater benefits for male students except in the case of student government involvement. For example, male students who participated in service activities scored nine percent higher on reading scores than those who didn’t. In comparison, female students scored about five percent higher than those who did not participate in service opportunities. This gender difference also rang true for mathematics, science, and history achievement. However, the one civic activity where young women demonstrated a higher rate of academic achievement than young men was student government.

This gender trend was also found in the impact on college graduation. Male students involved in community service to fulfill class requirement were 29 percentage points more likely to graduate from college while females came in at 18 points higher. However, with student government participation females were 19 percentage points more likely to graduate from college while males were 11 points more likely.

“While there has been a movement, albeit with good intentions, among school districts and administrators towards student required community service, there has been very little data to measure the academic impact of students involvement in civic activities,” said Peter Levine, executive director of CIRCLE. “These two studies suggest that it is having a positive academic influence among students not only during their high school years, but in college as well.”

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Since 2001, CIRCLE has conducted, collected, and funded research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and is funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and other foundations.