

Practicing Democracy on Wicked Problems Through Deliberation: Essentials for Civic Learning and Student Development

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Infusing the curriculum with deliberative practice transforms civic education from episodic moments to sustained practice. The capacities necessary for productive and meaningful democratic engagement—critical thinking, empathic listening, creative problem solving, ethical leadership, and collaboration—are not only essential for sustaining a vibrant democracy, they are the best preparation for our students-citizens to be successful in the 21st century. The practice of deliberation cultivates students thinking to explore enduring, and multidisciplinary questions and address persistent (and wicked) public problems. Students who engage in deliberative practice see politics differently and experience enhanced engagement in their democratic lives.

INTRODUCTION

America's democracy is experiencing an identity crisis. National polls consistently show that not a single national political leader is viewed in a positive light on a consistent basis, while confidence in our political institutions are at record lows. Only 19 percent of Americans trust government always or most of the time (Pew Research Center 2015). The dysfunctional political environment culminated in the 2016 presidential election, where the socioeconomic and political cleavages highlight the growing disparities in access, privilege, and hope (Cramer 2016). Party polarization and gridlock, an often-noted decrease of civility in Washington among representatives from different parties reflect an adversarial mobilizing politics that Boyte (2009) sees as emerging out of the ashes of the 1960's. This kind of politics is ill-suited for the problems America faces in the 21st Century. Given the polarization and dysfunctional politics defining the 21st century, the purpose of higher education is scrutinized, and its purpose is compromised, as many may tend to lose hope, reduce compromise, and even decimate democratic principles such as LaFollette's Wisconsin Idea. Rather than burying our heads in the sand or in the ivory tower, our community practice seeks to explore and define a different identity of a civic conscience, which highlights the collaboration between the American Democracy Project, the Democracy Commitment, and its member AACU institutions to highlight the importance of dialogue and deliberation in meeting the core commitments in higher education of "educating for personal and social responsibility" and in "taking seriously the perspectives of others" (AACU 2009).

In an engaged democracy, coproduction or complementary production is a process to engage citizens in addressing the "wicked problems" of contemporary communities. When there is a decline in trust for

government-provided solutions and the capacity for government to provide efficient, effective, and equitable service delivery is dwindling and no longer welcomed, the place for hope lies in citizen engagement, where the citizen plays an active or complementary role (Ostrom 2010). Citizen engagement is not only a way to dwindle the institutional legacies of a client-centered paternalistic and passive approach to service delivery, but it is also a way to increase the level of trust in institutions and public service.

The essence of coproduction is contemporary public management. In coproduction or complementary production, the citizens are partners in service delivery and identify and evaluate the needs for services with local government (Clark, Brudney and Jang 2013, 697). Local governments and the citizens they serve co-create and implement policies which best serve the citizens in their shared jurisdictions. This may lead to economies of scale, however in the challenges of the 21st century, jurisdictional boundaries and stagnant labor and capital are no longer the norm. Communities are faced with inequities of distribution and politics in their service delivery and responsiveness. Income inequality and economic disparity affect entire communities and their quality of life. In her examination of means-tested programs, Sharp (2009) expanded coproduction to the policy centered approach, where coproduced programs affected the political involvement and efficacy of clients, recipients, targets, and the like. No longer is coproduction restricted to targeted or universal policy programs and policy typologies but is a strategy and process to achieve a deserved quality of life.

The active role of the citizen, rather than the consumer or the client, determines the ethos of the community and the health of the democracy or public. H. George Frederickson's seminal work in public administration complements the work of Sharp nicely into civic governance and the contemporary challenges facing local governments and communities where, "civism needs to be restored, and given the continued need for active citizenship, it must be" (Byer and Cooper 2012, S113).

Coproduction

The creation of civic capacity or infrastructure is often in the process, rather than the outcome. These are especially salient when the restoration of civic trust in a community is warranted (Van Ryzin 2011). Whereas in the early nineties, the economy was booming, and coproduction or complementary processes were nonfalsifiable. In other words, they were unlikely to fail given the enabling economic environment and spirit of public service many scholars highlighted (Frederickson 1996). These same processes of coproduction are in need of attentive study to understand their effects in today's complex and marketized states of vulnerable public trust.

Much as public servants are engaged in the policy process through its formation and implementation, citizens in coproduction are responsible for the same policy process. If the policy process rather than just the definition of the problem or output is the focus, "the purpose of citizen participation is as much to communicate preferences and influence policymaking as to assist in the implementation of the public good and to contribute to its preservation and continuation. In addition, the consequences of citizen participation in local service delivery are tangible and reflect both collective and individual benefits" (Marschall 2004, 232). Then coproduction becomes the process or means to build civic infrastructure, which may weather the storms of fiscal stress and polarized politics.

Employing the strategy of coproduction increases public trust in government and citizen trust in community. The new public management (NPM) focus on performance results suggests that citizens develop trust from outcomes or results, however the development of trust is not guaranteed. A coproduction strategy which focuses on process encourages trust, regardless of outcomes, results, or disappointments. Processes such as fairness, equity, respect, and honesty matter a great deal in citizen's everyday lives (Van Ryzin 2011, 747). A coproduction process which focuses on these will increase public trust more than achieving short term performance results and policy goals.

Wicked Problems

The accessibility of local governments to the practical challenges faced by citizens lead many public managers to face wicked problems. The fields of political science and public administration is well-suited

to study coproduction as the frontline delivery of goods and services interacts with the public on a frequent and consistent basis (Ostrom 2010). To Weber and Khademian (2008) “wicked problems” are unstructured, cross-cutting, and relentless. Because of these characteristics, formal institutional arrangements and processes are ineffective (van Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan 2003, 211). Allen (2012) labels these “black swan” events as wicked problems, which “no single person, agency, department, company, nongovernmental organization, or any other entity has the sole means to deal with” (2012, 320). Instead networks of “effort,” “knowledge”, and the like are able to transcend institutional, jurisdictional, and traditional policy and cultural boundaries (Allen 2012; Bureren, Klijn, and Koppenjan 2003; Khademian 2008), Effective, equitable, and efficient management of a wicked problem calls for a new and sustainable process and knowledge base “to serve as a premise for cooperation, and the effort to transfer, receive, and integrate knowledge will be an ongoing effort” (Weber and Khademian 2008, 337).

In their seminal work “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning” Rittel and Webber (1973) argued that “the professional’s job was once seen as solving an assortment of problems that appeared to be definable, understandable, and consensual.” But they go on to point out that “the professionalized cognitive and occupational styles that were refined in the first half of this century ...are not readily adapted to contemporary conceptions of interacting open systems and to contemporary concerns with equity.” They argue that today’s problems are wicked problems as opposed to the tame problems that modern experts were taught to solve. Wicked problems have no definitive solution through standard technocratic measures of success because it is impossible to compare solutions in terms of their efficiency. Not only do the problems not have any definitive definition, but the solutions cannot be good or bad/true or false, they can only impact a problem and in turn give rise to additional spillover effects in other areas.

Drawing from that work, Carcasson (2013) notes that while “wicked problems cannot be ‘solved’ ... the tensions inherent in wicked problems can certainly be addressed in ways that are better or worse” and “tackling wicked problems requires different forms of inquiry, communication, problem solving, and decision making than we often see on politics or public policy research.”

Civic skills become useful because they teach young people the skills needed to deal with wicked problems. Carcasson sees three strategies that are commonly used to deal with wicked problems. First, expert strategies seek to tame wicked problems by placing authority to make decisions in the hands of relatively small numbers of stake holders thus reducing the wickedness of the problem. The second strategy for dealing with wicked problems are adversarial strategies. Adversarial strategies, like a market, are zero sum and some interests will win while others will lose. The third way to deal with wicked problems are deliberative strategies that discard the zero sum mentality and instead adopt a win-win perspective. Carcasson argues specifically that deliberative strategies are superior because they result in decisions having more legitimacy since all stakeholders have had a role in the definition of the problems and the formulation of the solutions. In short, deliberative strategies get more buy in from affected groups. Given the current dissatisfactions of the American public with the state of American democracy with Congress having an approval rating of 13% in Gallup polls, the problems of democracy are clearly related to the emphasis on expert and adversarial processes to solve wicked problems at the expense of deliberative processes (Theis 2016).

Democratic dialogue and deliberation build civic capacities and consciences to tackle the highly salient and most complex wicked problems facing communities today. It rejects the expert model of technical expertise and specialization towards a truly democratic framework of accessibility and empowerment. The practice of dialogue and deliberation, we argue, cultivates student abilities necessary to explore enduring and multidisciplinary questions and solve persistent public problems. These types of questions and problems are those for which there is no singular position, nor answer. They are complex, multi-layered, interdisciplinary, and often reveal the values inherent in policy issues and choices necessary in the practice of democratic citizenship. They are questions/issues where participants must weigh the tradeoffs and tensions that are integral in any approach to solving the problem. They are questions that typically invite difficult conversations, where participants practice deep listening and critical self-reflection. Infusing the curriculum with dialogic and deliberative practice, then, is another

way to move civic education from episodic moments to sustained practice. Thus, the capacities necessary for productive and meaningful dialogue and deliberation—critical thinking, empathic listening, creative problem solving, ethical leadership, collaboration, issue framing—are not only essential for sustaining a vibrant democracy, they are the best preparation for our students/citizens/graduates to be successful in the 21st century. As Peter Levine (2013) and others have argued, strong civic education is not only correlated to strong professional (or workforce) development but also causally related. In fact, Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2013) suggest that civic skills are essential to successful job skills and professional development.

Materials for democratic deliberation are developed by the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) as a way to deal with “wicked problems” in constructive and democratic ways. Deliberative Dialogues provide a framework to have citizens discuss controversial and often polarizing issues in a civil and productive manner. Trainings are held for students, faculty, and community members to be trained to moderate Deliberative Dialogues. Community deliberations are held on issues of national importance that bring together students, faculty, and community members. These deliberation parse an issue from at least 3 “frames” as outlined in a NIFI issue book. Participants discuss the tradeoffs of potential actions focusing on the values driving their choices. Participants leave a deliberative dialogue with an appreciation for why differences exist and how different values lead to different preferences. Participants are also asked to focus on what areas of common interest exist that provide a launching point for people with divergent perspectives to work together to impact the issue in a positive way. Research has shown that people who engage in Deliberative Dialogues begin to see politics differently from the adversarial electoral politics that have become so divisive. They also begin to find a different role for citizens and a different way of participating in the democratic process (Lawrence and Theis 2016).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The National Issues Forum Institute is a non-partisan institute that promotes value-based solutions to complex societal problems. Two important components make NIF unique from partisan solutions to these problems; the forum and the framework structuring this democratic deliberation. The forums are designed to be different from classroom lectures, or political debates. Participants come together to deliberate solutions to societal challenges, based on unbiased facts. Several options are proposed as solutions to these wicked problems. Participants deliberate the costs and benefits of each option, in order to find out which solution they will support as a community (National Issues Forum 2017). The framework allow and encourages inclusion of all viewpoints surrounding the issue being explored.

The ‘Framework’ was designed for neutrality. It’s a method of discussion that removes the kind of bias we find in political parties, special interest groups and the press. It doesn’t allow one-sided lecture, polarizing positions or citizen passivity. It begins and ends with you [participants] and your deepest concerns (National Issues Forum 2017).

This type of democratic deliberation encourages participants to seek change, but these changes are different from traditional party-line solutions. Participants are more likely to initiate changes as a community to deal directly with problems. Thus, communities will develop solutions based on shared values and understanding of the underlying issue. We refer to these solutions as ‘common ground’ solutions to ‘wicked problems.’

Our forum focused on the timely and controversial issue of Safety & Justice. This was a brand new NIF issue in fall 2018. Participants were given an Issue Book containing information about various aspects of the issue, and three potential policy solutions. NIF Issue Books are based on verifiable and unbiased facts with real-world policy proposals intended to solve the problem being examined. In our forum, we employed trained and experienced moderators to lead small-groups in deliberation. While these moderators remained objective when introducing the issue and solution options, they encouraged broad group participation.

Data

Participants were enrolled in upper and lower political science courses at Winona State University at the time of our forum, and 45 students completed an electronic pre-and post-survey. Our surveys were based on the *NIF Safety & Justice post-forum questionnaire*, modified to measure demographic variables, and included open-ended questions gaging participants experience with the forum. Also, we included standard PEW and ANES question wording for measuring political efficacy, trust in government, and interest in politics. The pre-forum survey was available one day prior to the event to ensure study validity. Post-forum surveys were available one and a half day after the forum to ensure adequate completion time for each participant. Survey responses were combined into one dataset with forum participation acting as the treatment. Analysis of the data revealed an increase in the perceived ability to understand *and* influence politics.

The main goal of deliberating societal problems directly, is to cultivate common ground solutions to wicked problems. These abilities are shaped differently; we measure them as the difference between responses on the pre-and post-forum survey. We attribute these measurable shifts solely to forum participation. Surveys reveal a remarkable change in students' attitudes towards the issue-solutions deliberated on during the Safety & Justice forum. Generally, the urgency of improving relations between police and the community, experienced increased support in the post-forum survey. Students seem to understand that reforms are desperately needed. For example: "The number of unarmed people of color who have lost their lives in encounters with the police shows there is something fundamentally wrong with the culture, training, and recruitment in too many of this nation's police departments." The number of students that agreed or strongly agreed with this statement increased from 57% in the pre-survey to 72% in the post-survey. We attribute this change in attitudes to the process of democratic deliberation. However, changes in attitudes means little if citizens are unable to influence politics. Therefore, we examined changes in students' perceived ability to influence government. Following the forum students were more likely to indicate 'they felt qualified to engage in politics.' 62% of students agreed or agreed strongly with this statement in the post-survey compared to 42% of students in the pre-survey.

Our main variable of concern measures political efficacy, where efficacy can be both internal and external. Internal efficacy gages how an individual is able to effectively influence politics and policy outcomes, while external efficacy is an individual's estimation of the system's responsiveness (Craig and Maggiotto 1982). Political efficacy is directly linked with coproduction or complementary production of public services and solutions. Therefore, it is important to measure our deliberative politics forum's impact on students' own perception of ability to influence politics and public policy. We operationalized internal efficacy as the responses to a survey question: "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics." External efficacy was measured by the question: "Public officials don't care what people like me think." These two variables, internal/external efficacy, measures students' perception of their own ability to influence government policy, and how responsive the government is with policies aimed at solving societal problems. Further, we included measures for independent variables in our pre-forum surveys and connected them to post-survey responses by linking through an identifier. These variables contain measurements for age, race, gender, ideology, partisanship, and political participation etc. Age is measured as the answer to an open-ended question. Race was coded as Asian-American, African American, Latino, Native American, and White. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable, women and man. The variable measuring political partisanship offered Republican, Independent, and Democrat as choice options. Participatory variables included whether a student voted in the 2016 Presidential Election, and if a student had recently participated in a protest. We also included a variable for year in college, whether a student majored in political science & public administration, and the type of community they lived in. Community choices ranged from rural, small town, suburban, to urban areas. This variable captures the population density surrounding a student.

Results

Forum participation resulted in measurable changes in the perception of political efficacy among students. Table 1 shows mean values of several questions gaging efficacy. Comparing pre-and post-forum

survey responses, our participants' perception of their own ability to influence politics, increased 18.5%. Our forum also increased participants' trust in government by more than 20%. The issues included in the Safety & Justice forum are by nature, contentious, wicked, difficult, and increasingly partisan. However, the forum appears to have instilled our student participants with an understanding of solving contentious issues as a group. Government may not provide the best alternative, as those solutions are highly partisan, and by coming together as a community, participants were able to deliberate on wicked issues by finding common ground within their groups.

TABLE 1
STUDENT RESPONSES BEFORE AND AFTER NIFI SAFETY & JUSTICE FORUM

Survey Questions	Pre-test Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Post-test Mean (<i>SD</i>)
I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics.	3.13 (<i>1.03</i>)	3.71 (<i>0.92</i>)
Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?	2.95 (<i>1.04</i>)	3.00 (<i>0.80</i>)
Public officials don't care what people like me think.	3.22 (<i>0.95</i>)	3.24 (<i>0.80</i>)
How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?	1.24 (<i>0.53</i>)	1.49 (<i>0.50</i>)

N = 45

A renewed trust in government's ability to effectively respond to citizens' needs, appears to be a driving factor in explaining renewed confidence in peoples' ability to influence politics. Thus, trust in government and perception of internal efficacy are undoubtedly connected. However, this relationship does not indicate that the status quo is preferable. It may indicate that students realized they are able to influence politics and in turn, the government will provide better solutions to their needs. Interacting efficacies with trust reveals that race is a significant factor. We coded race as several minority groups and Caucasian. Our results, shown in Table 2, indicate that most whites trust government more than minority groups; therefore, they experienced an increased perception of internal efficacy by participating in our forum. Our minority students did not seem to experience increased trust and internal efficacy at the same rate as white participants. This finding is alarming.

Results from interacting external (systemic) efficacy with trust in government reveals several influential factors that may be due to the political climate in the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential Election. Our model indicates that the type of community a participant lives in matters, in addition to political partisanship and interest in politics levels. Community types range from rural, small town, suburban, urban, and are coded in this order to reflect proximity to larger communities, potentially plagued by wicked problems. Results for this variable indicate that as participants live in areas with higher population density, they trust government to do the right thing less in addition to feeling less able to influence this direction of government.

TABLE 2
ORDERED LOGIT MODELING CHANGES IN POLITICAL EFFICACY INTERACTED WITH TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

	Internal (SD)	Efficacy	External (SD)	Efficacy
Age	-0.63 (0.75)		-0.58 (0.41)	
Gender	-1.35 (1.01)		-0.45 (0.74)	
Race	8.25 (2.56)*		-0.88 (0.78)	
Year in College	0.69 (0.99)		0.46 (0.61)	
Community Type	-0.70 (0.49)		-1.06 (0.41)*	
Political Partisanship	-0.01 (0.52)		-1.17 (0.40)*	
Protest participation	0.63 (1.22)		1.22 (0.84)	
Political Science Major	-0.47 (1.41)		-0.57 (0.91)	
Updated Interest in politics	0.04 (0.87)		-1.67 (0.65)*	
AIC	64.7		109.7	
Res. Dev.	42.7		83.7	
<i>N</i>	45		45	

Significance: $P \geq 0.001$ **, $P \geq 0.05$ *, $P > 0.1$.

Partisanship was coded as Republican, Independent, Democrat, Socialist (open-ended response). Results from our model indicate that politically liberal students feel less trust in government, and less able to personally influence the public discourse. Renewed interest in government follow a similar pattern to community type and partisanship. Although we do not measure the Trump-effect directly, our results speak to the current political division in America. Donald Trump rode a wave of support from rural Republicans, with renewed interest in politics due in part to Trump himself and his ‘tell-it-as-it-is’ approach to politics. (Gould and Harrington 2016).

By grouping respondents according to their reported changes in perception of internal efficacy, we are able to refine the factors driving these changes in efficacy. We measured changes in internal efficacy by calculating a probit model. Three categories were derived from survey responses; Table 3 shows the estimates for each provided by the model. This setup provides a bit more leverage as we are able to determine influential factors for each group (Fournier, et al. 2011). It reveals that trust is a significant factor in determining increased perception of internal efficacy. This relationship reached significance at the conventional level ($p = 0.05$). For those participants who experienced a decrease in levels of internal efficacy, only one of our variables reached significance. Although at lower than conventional levels ($p = 0.1$), men were more likely to experience a drop in confidence that they were able on influence government affairs.

TABLE 3
PROBIT MODEL OF INTERNAL EFFICACY ATTITUDE CHANGES

	Increased Internal Efficacy (SD)	No Change in Internal efficacy (SD)	Decreased Internal efficacy (SD)
Age	0.28 (0.27)	-0.33 (0.27)	0.51 (0.29)
Gender	0.55 (0.47)	-0.65 (0.47)	0.62 (0.48)
Race	2.46 (174.12)	-2.51 (169.06)	2.23 (175.42)
Year in College	-0.37 (0.40)	0.49 (0.40)	-0.47 (0.42)
Political Partisanship	-0.11 (0.23)	0.15 (0.24)	-0.17 (0.24)
Protest participation	-0.04 (0.17)	0.07 (0.17)	0.06 (0.17)
Updated trust in government	1.03 (0.51)*	-1.02 (0.52)	0.69 (0.46)
Constant	-17.80 (870.63)	18.81 (845.30)	-22.02 (877.13)
AIC	69.524	68.262	68.31
Res. Dev.	53.524	52.31	52.262
N	45	45	45

Significance: $P \geq 0.001$ **, $P \geq 0.05$ *, $P \geq 0.1$.

Internal efficacy manifests itself in the political universe in different forms; some choose to participate in demonstrations against the political establishment. This may be an indication that students feel that the political system is not representing their interests and they take to the streets to protest. In our study, protest participation is significantly related to a major in political science and public administration at WSU. Results are shown in Table 4. These findings are similar to what Csajko and Lindaman (2011, 70) found in their study of how: “political engagement educates citizens and leads to political understanding...but only when that activity is reinforced by political science coursework.” Another expression of this type of efficacy can be found in electoral participation. Our results indicate that those identifying with the Democratic Party and those who lived outside densely populated areas were more likely to vote in the 2016 Presidential Election. However, these variables were only significant at the $p = 0.1$ level. As expected, political partisanship is a significant predictor of vote choice for this election, where most participants voted with their party.

TABLE 4
LOGIT MODEL OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES

	Protest Participation	Voting in 2016 Presidential Election	2016 Presidential Candidate
Age	-0.18 (0.57)	0.44 (0.59)	-0.76 (0.93)
Gender	-0.03 (0.89)	-3.53 (2.19)	-1.52 (2.35)
Community Type	0.89 (0.54)	-1.92 (1.10)	1.49 (1.03)
Year in College	-0.60 (0.78)	-1.64 (1.24)	-0.41 (1.18)
Political Partisanship	0.35 (0.46)	1.26 (0.77)	2.56 (1.06)*
Political Science Major	2.24 (1.08)*	17.96 (3343.64)	0.62 (1.64)
Constant	-0.02 (10.94)	4.84 (10.24)	9.43 (16.28)
AIC	54.83	37.663	29.15
Res. Dev.	40.83	23.66	15.15
N	45	45	29

Significance: $P \geq 0.001$ **, $P \geq 0.05$ *, $P \geq 0.1$.

Both political partisanship and forum learned, internal efficacy, are negatively related to the dependent variable; an index measuring students’ support across six different Safety & Justice issues, shown in Table 5. Meaning, Democrats and those students who learned internal efficacy from the forum,

are associated with fewer changes in this index. This is not surprising. The current political climate appears increasingly hostile towards Democrats and their political agenda. Further, the deliberative forum model does not rely on a partisan framework. These new abilities to solve wicked problems, introduced to students throughout the forum, cultivate a different response path. Students learned new abilities to influence policy outside the framework of government structures. On the other hand, support for solutions proposed during the forum, are shaped more through a structured approach to problem solving and policy provision.

TABLE 5
ORDERED LOGIT MODELING CHANGES IN SUPPORT FOR SAFETY & JUSTICE ISSUES

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-0.74 (0.39)	-0.75 (0.39)	-0.71 (0.39)
Race	-0.40 (0.46)	-0.43 (0.47)	-0.49 (0.46)
Year in College	1.04 (0.54)	1.06 (0.55)	1.04 (0.55)
Community Type	-0.03 (0.32)	-0.10 (0.34)	-0.14 (0.33)
Partisanship	-0.20 (0.31)	-0.32 (0.34)	-0.34 (0.34)
Political Science major	-0.51 (0.80)	-0.49 (0.81)	-0.53 (0.80)
Political participation: Voting	-0.29 (0.93)	-0.34 (0.94)	-0.47 (0.92)
Political participation: Protesting	-0.78 (0.77)	-0.68 (0.78)	-0.54 (0.76)
Internal Efficacy Forum Learning	-0.78 (0.39)*	-0.78 (0.39)*	-
External Efficacy Forum Learning		-0.36 (0.40)	-
Efficacy Learning			-0.57 (2.02)*
AIC	225	226	225
Res. Dev.	187.3	186.5	187
N	45	45	45

Significance: $P \geq 0.001$ **, $P \geq 0.05$ *, $P \geq 0.1$.

We argue that democratic deliberation cultivates abilities that participants may rely on when solving the wicked problems facing communities. Results from our pre-and post-forum survey supports this argument; students recognize a renewed ability to influence governing structures on a (inter)personal level. The NIF on Safety & Justice exposed students to complex and controversial issues between police and the communities they serve. Forum participation tended to increase students' perception that they are able to change the current policy direction and solve these daunting problems by coming together as a community. Table 6 shows results from an OLS regression modeling increased support for the issues deliberated during the forum.

TABLE 6
OLS MODEL OF AN INDEXED DEPENDENT VARIABLE; MEASURING HCNAGE SIN
SUPPORTY FOR FORUM ISSUES

	Coefficients	Std. Error	P-value
Age	-0.607	0.524	0.255
Gender	1.218	0.938	0.203
Race	-0.087	0.824	0.917
Year in College	0.333	0.759	0.663
Community Type	-0.262	0.483	0.591
Partisanship	-1.201	0.472	0.016*
Political Science major	0.351	1.207	0.773
Political participation: Voting	0.206	1.355	0.880
Political participation: Protesting	-0.638	1.052	0.548
Internal Efficacy/Forum Learning	-1.450	0.545	0.011*
Constant	14.703	9.975	0.150
Adjusted R ² = 0.11			
Res. Std. Error = 2.62			
N = 45			
Significance: P>=0.001 **, P>=0.05 *, P>=0.1 .			

Perception of external efficacy appears to be shaped by knowledge about politics. By interacting changes in support levels for proposed solutions, partisanship again appears as a significant predictor. Also, the variable for majoring in political science, achieved statistical significance in determining perception of this type of efficacy. Table 7 shows results from an OLS regression modeling changes in support interactions among the deliberated solutions. Democrats and political science & public administration majors seems to understand how the governing structure functions and are increasingly likely to support policy solutions through this framework.

TABLE 7
OLS MODEL OF AN INTERACTIVE DEPENDENT VARIABLE; MEASURING CHANGES IN
SUPPORT FOR FORUM SOLUTIONS

	Coefficients	Std. Error	P-value
Age	5.852	11.532	0.615
Gender	-39.886	20.696	0.062
Race	29.340	18.328	0.119
Year in College	-3.523	16.674	0.834
Community Type	-14.597	10.747	0.183
Partisanship	28.564	10.467	0.010*
Political Science major	81.432	27.697	0.006*
Political participation: Voting	-0.755	29.354	0.799
Political participation: Protesting	-5.044	8.180	0.542
Internal Efficacy/Forum Learning	-1.203	11.846	0.920
Constant	-217.215	219.566	0.329
Adjusted R ² = 0.20			
Res. Std. Error = 59.9			
N = 45			
Significance: P>=0.001 **, P>=0.05 *, P>=0.1 .			

Interestingly, male participants are less likely to support forum solutions using a system framework. It indicates that female students are more likely to increase their support for actions taken by the system to solve complex issues. However, this relationship only reached statistical significance at the $p = 0.1$ level.

DISCUSSION

Current political polarization, culminating in the 2016 Presidential election of Donald Trump, does not ease the challenges facing our country. In such a polarized and dysfunctional political environment, the purpose of higher education is scrutinized, and its purpose is compromised, as many may tend to lose hope, reduce cooperation, and even decimate democratic principles. Highlighting the importance of democratic deliberation is one step in the right direction when overcoming divisive politics and approach wicked problems. In our study of removing divisive politics from the wicked issue of Community Safety, we have started the process of bridge building.

Wicked problems are relentless, wieldy, cumbersome, nor are they easily defined and solved. Deliberative strategies are superior when approaching these types of problems since it allows input from all stakeholders. In short, deliberative strategies get more buy in from affected groups (Carcasson). These types of questions and problems are those for which there is no singular position, nor answer. They are complex, multi-layered, interdisciplinary, and often reveal the values inherent in policy issues and choices necessary in the practice of democratic citizenship. They are questions/issues where participants must weigh the tradeoffs and tensions that are integral in any approach to solving the problem. They are questions that typically invite difficult conversations, where participants practice deep listening and critical self-reflection. Infusing the curriculum with dialogic and deliberative practice, then, is another way to move civic education from episodic moments to sustained practice. Thus, the capacities necessary for productive and meaningful dialogue and deliberation—critical thinking, empathic listening, creative problem solving, ethical leadership, collaboration, issue framing—are not only essential for sustaining a vibrant democracy, they are the best preparation for our students/citizens/graduates to be successful in the 21st century.

In this study we have argued that the practice of dialogue and deliberation, cultivates student abilities necessary to explore enduring and multidisciplinary questions and solve persistent public problems. We relied on the National Issues Forum framework of Deliberative Dialogue to help cultivate understanding and cooperation when dealing with difficult societal issues. Results from our pre-and post-forum survey supports this argument; students recognize a renewed ability to influence governing structures on a (inter)personal level. The NIF on Safety & Justice exposed students to complex and controversial issues between police and the communities they serve. Forum participation tended to increase students' perception that they are able to change the current policy direction and solve daunting problems by coming together as a community. Our participants' perception of their own ability to influence politics, increased 18.5%. Our forum also increased participants' trust in government by more than 20%. The issues included in the Safety & Justice forum are by nature, contentious, wicked, difficult, and increasingly partisan. However, the forum appears to have instilled our participants with an understanding of solving contentious issues as a group. It seems clear to us that approaching wicked problems through the NIF framework is more productive in cultivating the abilities necessary for democratic participation.

When we take “party politics” out of the equation we are able to reach consensus on solutions to wicked problems. While many of our participants displayed skepticism prior to forum participation, most agreed this was a constructive approach to tackling the daunting challenges our communities are facing. Participants discussed the tradeoffs of potential actions focusing on the values driving their choices. They left the forum with an appreciation for why differences exist, and how different values lead to different preferences. Participants focused on areas of common interests to provide a launching point for people with divergent perspectives to work together to impact the issue in a positive way. Research has shown that people who engage in deliberative dialogues begin to see politics differently from the adversarial electoral politics that have become so divisive. They also begin to find a different role for citizens and a different way of participating in the democratic process (Lawrence and Theis 2016). Our results are

consistent with this strain of research. Exposing university students to these deliberative dialogues allow them to develop skills critical for a vibrant democracy, and a successful career.

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