



Civic Learning Online Executive Summary

The CCCE Digital Media and Civic Learning Project addresses the question of how informal online environments can effectively engage the citizenship and learning styles of younger generations.

Digital media technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to help young citizens learn to engage with public life. Many young citizens are interested in learning how to advocate for their own causes and to develop more effective public voices. At the same time, they often have uneven experiences with developing effective organization and public voice skills. Learning how to develop public voices and sustainable networks can be enhanced through access to digital public networking, content production, distribution technologies and skills training. Effective and satisfying application of such digital voice and networking technologies requires scholars and practitioners to develop clearer standards about how various tools and online communities actually advance particular civic learning goals. We aim to create a set civic learning standards and tools to help young people develop effective public voices and sustainable advocacy networks. These standards will be useful for youth workers and other online community developers to review and align their practices.

This project involves three main areas:

- A review and synthesis of perspectives on youth identity, civic learning and engagement both online and offline. The outcome will be a set of standards for defining key civic learning goals and assessing differing approaches to civic learning online.
- These civic learning standards will be used to evaluate a broad sample of over 40 predominantly U.S. (also some Canadian and British) online youth engagement sites and programs. This evaluation will take into account differences in civic learning opportunities, the nature of community decision-making and governance, social networking applications, varieties of participatory media content creation, and what these elements suggest about the implicit citizen identity styles being engaged.



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- An assessment and review of the Seattle digital youth commons, named Puget Sound Off by the teens designing it. PSO is a youth engagement web environment housing many issue and interest communities. Founded through a partnership between the City of Seattle, CCCE and the Seattle Metrocenter YMCA, PSO involves hands-on participation from a diverse spectrum of regional teens ages 13-18. Youth learn about using participatory media to develop public voice and organize effective action. They also participate in design decisions and share site management and editorial responsibilities. With the aid of the MacArthur grant, CCCE will bring in outside experts to review learning goals, participatory media curriculum, site networking features, and youth participation and management practices. This phase of the project will document procedures for building partnerships with youth organizations and service learning, and identify practices that sustain youth governance. We also plan to explore partnerships with libraries as youth access points and as co-sponsors of community games and other civic networking activities.

The project aims to establish a set of well-articulated and documented civic learning goals and practices to serve as standards for scholars, practitioners and young people in designing and operating online civic communities. For each area of the project, CCCE staff led by Lance Bennett will consult an array of digital media and civic learning experts, including other MacArthur grantees working in related areas. Recommendations and suggestions for future directions from these experts will be presented at a conference at the University of Washington in the fall of 2008. The conference will include experts, project staff, MacArthur grantees and officers, community partners, and young citizens who have joined the PSO community. A final report on the project, along with other reports and publications will be made available on the Civic Learning Online Blog

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Project Outcomes



Practitioners Blog

www.engagedyouth.org

CCCE has created a blog as the public face of the project. This blog will feature conversations, debates, news, and project documentation to support scholars and practitioners in the area of online civic learning and engagement. You are invited to participate. This blog covers the following areas of discussion, among others:

- civic learning goals for digital media
- participatory media curriculum and training strategies to build digital skills
- strategic website design/build issues
- program sustainability (partnership strategies and youth management)



Youth Digital Media Commons

www.pugetsoundoff.org

The City of Seattle (Community technology department), the Seattle Metrocenter YMCA and CCCE are developing an online youth media environment to empower young people to engage in civic life by learning to effectively share and organize action communities around their personal and social interests. Media technologies enable formation of groups and networks clustered around topics such as arts, music, sports and issues that range from local to global in scope.

The web environment and supporting youth participation and organizational partnerships will serve as an opportunity to identify and document useful practices involving:

- learning goals established during the youth design and build process
- mapping learning features to different citizenship styles in younger generations
- addressing issues involving levels of adult-managed vs. autonomous youth input
- developing procedures for broadening and diversifying youth participation
- reviewing methods for facilitating digital media, public communication, and public networking skills among teens in the community



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Experts Provide Input:

- test beta site (February, 2008)
- provide comments and feedback on learning goal identification, participatory media skills training, and youth management models
- strategies for sustainable youth involvement
- community access strategies involving libraries, community centers
- participate in conference with PSO youth, scholars, and practitioners

 **Conference: October 2008**

CCCE will host a two-day conference/site visit at University of Washington, Seattle. (Dates to be determined.) Conference participants will include the team of academic experts, speakers, community partners, UW researchers and local youth.

The conference will host a series of roundtable and panel discussions revolving around the following topics:

- refining and further defining applied civic digital learning goals
- public voice and media skills, and strategies for facilitating them
- project sustainability: youth governance, recruitment, library & other points of access
- review and discussion of pugetsoundoff.org

 **Reports ~ Publications ~ Media**

Working papers and journal articles on the paradigm divide in thinking about civic learning– and suggested resolutions for scholars and practitioners.

Working papers and articles on varieties of civic learning in different online environments.



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Working papers and reports on civic learning standards and practices in online environments.

Creation of an interactive map of the civic youth web sphere that enables visitors to go to the sites and see what kinds of learning and engagement are happening all over the map (subject to additional funding).



Final Report

A general report to the foundation will summarize the activities, the findings, and the status of deliverables. The aim will be to draw connections among the three levels of activity (the high theoretical level, the survey and mapping of currently active young citizen online environments, and the depth look at the Seattle PSO digital commons project) to show how concepts and measures developed in the project apply to each one. The report will also summarize various practitioner documents, blog highlights, and scholarly articles produced during the project, and provide materials of the MacArthur Digital Media and Learning the Knowledge Network.

The model of civic learning and the supporting research findings will provide a basis for thinking about future directions in digital learning. The ongoing dialogue with MacArthur grantees from affiliated projects should help develop a set of shared concepts, questions, and next generation research that defines the field.



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Contact Information

Mail: Civic Learning Online c/o
Lance Bennett
Department of Political Science
University of Washington
Box 353530 (or for express delivery: Gowen Hall Room 101)
Seattle, WA 98195

Phone: CCCE
206 685 1504
Lance Bennett
(206) 213-0342
(206) 543-4946

Fax:
(206) 685-2146

Lance Bennett	Principle Investigator	lbennett@u.washington.edu
Adriana Gil Miner	Project Manager	gilminer@u.washington.edu
Deen Freelon	RA- Curriculum Dev.	dfreelon@u.washington.edu
Toby Campbell	RA- Sustainability	tobyc@u.washington.edu
Amanda Ballantyne	RA- Service Learning	acball@u.washington.edu
Chris Wells	RA- Learning Goals	cfw7@u.washington.edu
Allison Rank	RA- Learning Goals	arank@u.washington.edu