

**The Conceptualization of Civic Mindedness by BIPOC Students at the University of  
Pittsburgh**

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# **The Conceptualization of Civic Mindedness by BIPOC Students at the University of Pittsburgh**

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Civic mindedness, a civic outcome, is often defined as knowledge and involvement resulting in action (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). As an integral part of the development of civic identity, civic mindedness directly contributes to an individual's civic engagement (the process of deepening the knowledge, skills, values, and motivation of students to make a positive impact on their community). In order for predominately white institutions to determine best behaviors for culturally relevant civic co-curricular programming further research is still needed for a deeper understanding of the civic mindedness in Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students. Thus the purpose of this improvement project was to utilize qualitative research (constructivist perspective) to understand how undergraduate BIPOC students at the University of Pittsburgh incorporate practices from their racial and cultural backgrounds with their co-curricular campus activities to conceptualize their civic mindedness.

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## Chapter 1: Framing the Problem of Practice

Higher education institutions (HEIs) often aspire to develop a student's sense of citizenship in the hope that they will make meaningful contributions to society. This is derived from HEIs' historic purpose of preparing students to be productive citizens in society (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Notable scholars such as Dewey (1916) and Nodding (2000) explored the role of institutions of higher education in responding to society's need for dedicated individuals who can realize the power and resourcefulness of their personhood. However, in recent years, many scholars have urged higher education administrators to deepen and renew their commitment to develop and cultivate environments where students can make meaningful contributions to society and where justice orientated citizenship is encouraged (Mitchell & Soria, 2018). This call for change is echoed most recently through the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and cries for justice for unarmed Black people who died at the hands of police, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Tamir Rice, and numerous others. With administrators of HEIs issuing multiple statements, in which they publicly shared their commitment to racial justice and condemnation of racism and police brutality, these administrators must now revisit their purpose and mission to make an impactful contribution to society through students' development of civic outcomes (McKenzie, 2020).

With this renewed focus on developing citizenship while simultaneously seeking racial justice, HEIs' administrators have emphasized civic engagement as an outcome for student success (Bringle et al., 2017). Civic engagement, as defined by Ehrlich (2000), is the process of deepening the knowledge, skills, values, and motivation of students to make a positive impact on their community. Civic engagement is the process of working to make a difference in the civic life of

communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivations to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and nonpolitical processes (Ehrlich, 2000).

This definition of civic engagement within the context of higher education is often understood to be a constant action of development that is driven by civic outcomes created mostly by curricular and co-curricular experiences, even though most of what is understood about civic engagement in higher education is derived from service-learning courses (Hemer & Reason, 2017). Service learning is defined as a course or competency-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in mutually identified service activities that benefit the community and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader application of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (Clayton et al., 2012).

Even with increased offerings by universities to provide civic engagement opportunities and development for students, among the backdrop of racial uprisings and calls for justice, HEIs' administrators still struggle to achieve their original purpose of educating engaged citizens (Magolda & Boes, 2017). Administrators of HEIs must actively find ways to enhance civic outcomes while also acting to interdependently work with diverse communities ethically, with the consideration for racial justice and liberation for the increasingly diverse student population (Bowman et al., 2014; Garcia, 2020; Hemer & Reason, 2017). One way to do this is to assess the civic outcomes of students within higher education.

Most notably, civic engagement has been explored as an outcome for college students, with fewer studies exploring civic mindedness. Steinberg and Norris (2011) referred to civic mindedness as "a person's inclination or dispositions to be knowledgeable of and involve[d] in the

community and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community” (p. 12). The focus on civic mindedness is therefore needed because it combines factors from external environments such as formal and informal places of learning as well as an individual’s dispositions and attitudes toward advancing social change. There are gaps in the literature exploring civic mindedness and no empirical evidence of civic mindedness among students of color nor the impact of their racial or ethnic identity on their civic development. A deeper understanding of the experiences of students of color and their relationship to civic mindedness can implicate ways in which administrators of HEIs can advance their purpose. Exploring the civic outcome of civic mindedness in students of color can support such insights as it uniquely examines the individual’s values and relationship to their civic development.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem of Practice**

As the director of the Office of PittServes at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt), I am tasked with the creation and enhancement of co-curricular programs that support the development of civically engaged undergraduate students. In this role, I also supervise five departmental student groups whose members are undergraduate students who are responsible for sharing and promoting PittServes’ civic opportunities with their peers. Currently, PittServes does not collect student demographic data, including racial and ethnic identities, to assess participation in student civic engagement programming. There is no effort to determine which types of students are engaging in civic opportunities. Thus, civic engagement co-curricular programs at Pitt are created and promoted without a clear understanding of how students of color experience, develop, and understand their civic engagement journey.

In my experience, I noted that the students in these departmental student groups were mostly White women, and the few students of color were seldom involved in any racial or ethnic student organization on campus. My experience as an advisor and mentor to these students has shown me that they were mainly motivated to participate in this group by their post-graduation pursuits such as career opportunities and graduate school. With most of these students using their experience in the PittServes office to pursue gap year opportunities and medical school, I began to notice that very few White students saw their experiences in these groups as making a valuable contribution to the community or democracy. In other words, they get involved for self-serving reasons (i.e., to build their resume), not to serve others or communities.

A few years ago, I engaged in an informal conversation with Black women students who have not been involved in any PittServes student groups but were actively involved in the Black Action Society student organization. The conversation focused on the experiences of Black students on campus and the need be involved in promoting Pitt to Black students in the Pittsburgh area who desired to pursue higher education. These Black women stated their desire to be a part of an ecosystem that celebrated and promoted Black culture. Their willingness and excitement related to their sense of belonging as a community and obligation to provide other Black students with the same opportunities that they deemed as important. This conversation was particularly memorable as it contrasted a previous conversation with majority White student leaders involved in a PittServes program. I engaged in frequent conversations with our White student tutor cohort (majority White women) who mentored and tutored elementary students who were majority students of color, living in a historically Black neighborhood in the city of Pittsburgh. These conversations were mostly based on complaints from the student tutors about how students of color could not follow their lesson plans and questions about how to support these students after the

White police officer who killed Antwon Rose (a local Black teenager who was shot and killed in East Pittsburgh) was found not guilty. These two conversations differed greatly in the students' understanding of racial justice and police violence, participation in PittServes, and motivation for their involvement with the local community.

As a Black and mixed immigrant woman, I empathized greatly with the motivation of the Black students and their pursuit of advancing a culture for other students who are part of their racial group. As an alumna of the University of Pittsburgh, I related personally to the experiences of these Black students on campus and the role that racial and ethnic student organizations play in motivating individuals to be actively involved in societal issues. My participation in organizations on campus that serve racial and ethnic student groups created the catalyst for my civic engagement journey during college and after graduation. During my college experience, I was a federally recognized "legal alien," a green card holder, and a student who desperately wanted to be a voter in the historic 2008 presidential election. It was through my involvement in these student organizations that I began to learn about various social justice issues including reproductive health and education equity, the connection to policy and government, and direct service. My learning and understanding of societal issues during my college years were mainly shaped by my participation in these organizations. This was because I was unable to take any academic classes related to civic engagement due to the limitations of my major and the time commitment of a work-study job. It was with these experiences along with the motivation of my immigrant story that I continued to pursue civic engagement opportunities after graduation, serving in several social justice causes and volunteering with organizations that served people of color. With this personal motivation and connection to Pitt, I began to see my role within the Office of PittServes as

connected to advocating and working alongside students of color participating in their civic engagement journey.

In this problem of practice, the visibility of the civic engagement efforts of students of color was particularly important, as their lived experiences play a vital role in participation in societal issues. Documenting and understanding how to represent the civic participation of students of color is an urgent matter for HEIs, such as Pitt, that are currently evaluating the racist actions, policies, and systems from which their institutions have historically and currently benefited. The Office of PittServes views this problem as an urgent matter, as the organization started a rebranding process and beginning a new strategic plan using a framework for civic advising. As the leader who is responsible for the creation and implementation of this plan, I am responsible for sharing and creating the knowledge needed for staff members to advise students on their civic engagement journey. Understanding the civic development needs of students of color and the supports they will need is a timely pursuit in the development of the civic advising component of PittServes' strategic plan.

## **1.2 Purpose and Inquiry Questions**

The purpose of this improvement project was to utilize qualitative research to understand how undergraduate BIPOC students at the University of Pittsburgh incorporate practices from their racial and cultural backgrounds and co-curricular campus activities to conceptualize their civic mindedness. The following inquiry question guided the project: How do students of color conceptualize civic mindedness?

### 1.3 Context

This improvement project took place at Pitt within the Office of PittServes in the spring of 2022. This is an institution that is over 200-years old with four branch campuses with a total undergraduate full-time enrollment of 24,603 students in the fall of 2021. At the Oakland campus, the fall 2021 enrollment comprised over 19,980 undergraduate students with most of the enrolled students identifying as White (64%) while other racial/ethnic groups comprised of Hispanic/Latino (6.4%), African American/Black (5.4%), Asian (13.5%) and no Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and American Indian.

With the launch of the university's strategic plan in 2021 commonly known as "The Plan for Pitt," the university outlined its three strategic priorities, which include: (a) our people, (b) our programs, and (c) our purpose. This guidance of priorities outlines the university's strategies to create action oriented goals that drive initiatives that create and leverage expertise and knowledge of diverse communities to tackle some of society's challenges. This prioritization is important to note because it acknowledges the importance of the role of the university in societal issues within the city of Pittsburgh.

Understanding the racial/ethnic composition of the city of Pittsburgh [White (67%), Black/African American (23%), Asian (5.7%), Hispanic/Latino (3.1%)] is essential in understanding how relationships with a predominately White institution (PWI) such as Pitt can advance the strengths of the 89 neighborhoods and countless communities of color within the city of Pittsburgh. Understanding the needs and inequities of racial/ethnic groups in the city of Pittsburgh as well as continuing collaborative efforts and trust building is an essential position for the university to reflect upon as the institution considers its role in fostering a culture of civic engagement. For instance, the university must be present when the local community has racial



uprisings, like the one following the murder of Antwon Rose in East Pittsburgh, address findings about the city of Pittsburgh being the worst livable city for Black women, be connected to the hunger strike of Danielle Brown, address the rise of Latino/Hispanic immigration in the city, and grapple with the traumatic history of gentrification in historically Black neighborhoods.

Institutionally, the development of relationships between the university and racial/ethnic neighborhoods is usually led by university departments that lead efforts on civic engagement. Relationships between the university and specific racial or ethnic communities are led by specific departments; these include various initiatives such as the creation of the community engagement centers in local communities of Homewood, Hazelwood, and the Hill District, and a competitive accreditation for HEIs that signals their commitment to community engagement, the Carnegie Classification on Community Engagement (2015). However, several other departments also lead efforts with the various neighborhoods and communities. Leading the development of student civic engagement efforts is the Office of PittServes.

The Office of PittServes is part of the University of Pittsburgh's Division of Student Affairs and has become one of the key departments that leads the charge of community engagement efforts for undergraduate students. Since its creation in 2014, after previously being known as the Student Volunteer Outreach Program, PittServes has focused on student community engagement programming that is focused on sustainability, community development, and education. With the engagement of 3,215 volunteers, PittServes community engagement activities have recorded a total of 18,331 volunteer service hours for the academic year 2021-2022. During the 2020 calendar, the effects of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic sharply declined the student volunteer participation as the school year was completed remotely. There was an increase of high-level community engagement with faculty and staff through opportunities with the Pandemic Service

Initiative, an institutional response to pandemic community needs. As a member of the initiative, PittServes was able to co-lead the volunteer engagement efforts in conjunction with the Office of Engagement and Community Affairs.

It was in the creation of this improvement project that I came to understand the influence of institutional commitments to civic engagement and its connections to student experiences of their civic development. Utilizing the fishbone and driver diagrams, I began to connect the relationship between neighborhoods and student's civic outcomes. Going deeper into this connection, I also learned more about the importance of race and ethnicity in this connection and the implications for the future of civic engagement on campus.

#### **1.4 Key Stakeholders**

This improvement project addressed an important effort in understanding civic engagement outcomes for students of color, as the University of Pittsburgh continues to prioritize a well-rounded approach to student learning and experiences while in college. This problem of practice impacted key groups and individuals within the university who play a key role in the development of the culture of civic engagement on campus that led to civic participation. The stakeholders that were most impacted by this problem of practice included, students of color, community engagement professionals, and key student affairs administrators. These individuals are a part of the development of student civic engagement programming and can be found working in the Office of PittServes, Community Engagement Centers, Office of the Dean of Students, Institute of Politics, Honors College, and some academic departments. These staff members are usually not assigned as faculty and focus primarily on co-curricular program development and recruitment.

The interest of this problem of practice was to conceptualize civic-minded programming that would be reflective of the wants and needs of students of color on campus. These staff members have the agency to create programming related to a student's civic interest and development. This problem of practice adds to the knowledge of community engagement professionals in higher education.

Another key stakeholder for this problem of practice was the undergraduate students of color at Pitt. These students were the most fundamental stakeholders of this improvement project, as they shape the knowledge and provide insight into the implications for the current civic opportunities provided on campus. This project supported the dispositions of these students and validated their lived experiences as students of color on a PWI campus. The problem of practice also elevated the representation of the needs of these students especially in a time where HEIs are evaluating their role and institutional commitments as it relates to anti-racism.

The third group of stakeholders in this improvement project was the senior student affairs administrators. This group represents various Division of Student Affairs departments, including the Office of the Dean, Student Organization Resource Center, and the Office of PittServes. It is important for this stakeholder group to know the results and key findings of this improvement project because the members can provide and extend insight into the ongoing needs of students of color on campus as well as the resources needed by departments to carry out these needs. The Division of Student Affairs played a key role in the experiences of students on campus, particularly through co-curricular programs. Insight from this project provided further learning into this co-curricular programming development beyond the programs provided by the Office of PittServes.

This improvement project had boundaries, as it did not address the current gaps in all co-curricular civic engagement offerings at the university, thus only providing a snapshot of the overall learning and experiences of civic engagement development of students of color on campus.

Additionally, this project did not address the impact of newly developed anti-racism practices implemented by the university during the 2020–21 academic year. There is also the possibility of implication of the COVID-19 pandemic on student wellbeing and participation, as the effect of the pandemic is still being studied. Understanding the difference of experiences for upper-class students versus first and second year students who started their college year via virtual learning was also a limitation of this project. Programmatic development and design may have also differed from standard practice to accommodate for COVID-19 safety guidelines.

## **2.0 Chapter 2: Review of Supporting Literature**

The role of United States colleges and universities in shaping students as engaged people in society is a goal that is yet to be achieved (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). For this reason, understanding the field of civic engagement and its relationship to higher education is essential in the development and evaluation of students' civic outcomes. The themes explored in this review aimed to create an understanding of civic outcomes, including civic mindedness, the ways that students of color are civically engaged, and the role of diversity courses and co-curricular options in developing civic outcomes.

### **2.1 Student Civic Outcomes**

Developing student civic outcomes is aligned with the call to renew the commitment for colleges and universities to create campus cultures that are reflective of students' participation and understanding of their civic participation (Bringle et al., 2017). Civic outcomes have been an embedded part of co-curricular and curricular programs at HEIs for an established time. These programs are aimed to develop the students' ideas, activities, behaviors, and dispositions for their civic participation; however, there is much to be realized in how these outcomes are understood and measured (Hemer & Reason, 2017).

There is not a shared definition of civic outcomes, as civic outcomes are best understood through a multidimensional approach (Bowman, 2011; Hemer & Reason, 2017; Janke & Domagal-Goldman, 2017; Terkla & O'Leary, 2015). However, most findings in the literature state that civic

outcomes can be categorized into four areas, which include: (a) knowledge, (b) skills, (c) attitudes/values, (d) and behaviors (Hemer & Reason, 2017). Terms related to these categories have also emerged. Specifically, civic mindedness (Bowman, 2011; Hemer & Reason, 2017), civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998), civic awareness, and social capital (Lopez, 2017) have emerged to combine the four categories of civic outcomes. Although the literature of civic outcome definitions is disjointed, it is important to realize the role that the evaluation of these outcomes play on the experiences and engagement of students on university and college campuses. A common observation in the literature is the agreement of the definition of civic engagement as provided by Ehrlich (2000), used to guide the justification for measurements of civic outcomes (Doolittle & Faul, 2013; Gelmon, 2018). This definition states that civic engagement works to make a difference in the civic life of communities (i.e., in political and nonpolitical ways) and is the development of combined knowledge, skills, values and motivations that make this difference (Ehrlich, 2000). Using their interpretation of Ehrlich's (2000) definition, scholars devised civic programs that address civic outcomes for both HEIs and individual students (Hemer & Reason, 2017; Janke et al., 2017; Pike et al., 2017; Torney-Purta et al., 2015).

Civic mindedness emerges in the literature as a component of civic identity; however, civic mindedness has become a model for assessing overall civic identity and a means to conceptualize and measure student civic experiences over time (Hemer & Reason, 2017). Civic mindedness is defined as an individual's inclination to be knowledgeable about and involved in the community and have a commitment to act upon these inclinations (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). For this reason, civic mindedness has become a part of students' civic outcomes because of the integration of the students' knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behavioral intentions as shaped by experiences while attending HEIs (Hemer & Reason, 2017).

In understanding civic mindedness, scholars used a popular civic mindedness assessment tool called the civic minded graduate (CMG) model (Battistoni, 2013; Hemer & Reason, 2017; Steinberg et al., 2011). This model is used to identify and measure student civic learning outcomes and is a tool that often assesses civic engagement programs and teaching strategies (Steinberg et al., 2011). The CMG instrument measures a student's knowledge and action in the community as well as their sense of responsibility to address social and community issues (Hemer & Reason, 2017). Fostering the development of the civic-minded graduate brings together the student's understanding of their identity, educational experiences in formal and informal learning spaces, and their civic experiences (Steinberg et al., 2011). These areas are understood through four measurement procedures including: (a) CMG scale, (b) CMG narrative prompt, (c) CMG interview, and (d) rubric (Battistoni, 2013; Steinberg et al., 2011). Steinberg et al. (2011) used three data sets to inform the development of this scale, utilizing data obtained from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis students (first study 70 students, the second study 86 students, and third study random sample of 4, 396 undergraduate students). In each of these studies, findings indicated that civic engagement experiences such as taking a service-learning course positively correlated with the dimensions of the CMG model. However, in the design of this model, service-learning course design is used a baseline measurement for understanding student civic mindedness.

The relationship between service-learning and civic outcomes is deeply rooted in the literature. Service-learning is used as one of the primary frameworks in understanding civic outcomes, thus defining the characteristics of civic outcomes (Hemer & Reason, 2017). Most data gathered by the institution for civic outcomes are derived primarily from service-learning courses

(Bringle et al., 2004; DUBY et al., 2015; Pike et al., 2015). This creates few assessment tools focusing on civic related skills (Torney-Purta et al., 2015).

Institutions must look at their assessment data with a more comprehensive approach that will inform their curricular and co-curricular programs (Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2017; Torney-Purta et al., 2015). An over reliance on self-reporting data also seems to be a challenge for the assessment and reporting of civic outcomes (Gelmon, 2018; Hemer & Reason, 2017; Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2017). Linking civic outcomes to co-curricular activities has also been evident in the literature. This connection provides civic outcomes that expand the civic knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values of students and has proven to be a valuable part in understanding students' civic engagement and sense of belonging (Bowman, 2011; Bowman et al., 2014; Kisker et al., 2016; Lopez, 2017; Terkla & O'Leary, 2015). These researchers found that there is little continuity in service-learning course design that often lead to lack of opportunities for student reflection, interaction with community members and dialogue across differences. These civic outcomes produced by co-curricular engagement showcase that more research is warranted on civic outcomes beyond the scope of service-learning.

## **2.2 Racial-Ethnic Student Civic Engagement**

The role of racial and ethnic student organizations on civic outcomes cannot be undermined, as HEIs can look to these spaces to strengthen their commitments to providing civic engagement as an attainable student outcome (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Hemer & Reason, 2017; Janke & Domagal-Goldman, 2017; Kisker et al., 2016). This connection between the development and engagement of students and diversity in civic outcome research is an area of the literature that



still needs to be developed (Bowman, 2011; Lopez, 2017; Terkla & O’Leary, 2015). This connection to diversity and civic outcomes is mostly found in the research of racial and ethnic student organizations. Bowman et al. (2014) found that 6 years after graduation, members of racial and ethnic student organizations exemplified civic outcomes such as leadership, civic participation, societal values, etcetera. Even with this evidence of ongoing civic participation post-graduation, studies of civic engagement practices of students of color, students of immigrant background, and students from urban and low-income communities indicate lower levels of civic knowledge and political activity as compared to their White peers (Kuttner, 2016). Emerging literature indicated that this narrative of lower civic outcomes for minorized students leaves out the understanding of the experiences of these groups in navigating a White normative world, indicating a limitation in how we understand and promote civic engagement to students (Kuttner, 2016).

The impact of race on civic outcomes cannot be undermined, as research often shows that White students are often the ones to gain greater civic gains from diverse experiences as compared to their non-White counterparts (Cole & Zhou, 2013). With most of the research on civic mindedness derived primarily from service-learning courses (Hemer & Reason, 2017; Steinberg et al., 2011), current strategies to assess student civic outcomes do not examine the effect of racial and ethnic identity on students’ civic outcomes, especially at PWIs. McMillan (2017) indicated that civic mindedness should be developed in a way so that students can interact with different cultures in appropriate ways; however, this perspective assumes a race-neutral approach on civic mindedness and does not accommodate for the historical and daily pressures that students of color face as they interact within White spaces and White cultures.

### **2.3 Diversity Courses and Co-Curricular Options**

Related to the commitment of HEIs is the connection of civic outcomes to campuses' diversity courses and co-curricular options. This association is important to note because some aspects of civic outcomes are often perceived and assessed through the skillset of increased intercultural knowledge and competence (Finley, 2012). Understanding civic outcomes and its relationship to curricular and co-curricular initiatives on campuses can give insight into the support that students of color on campuses experience through co-curricular and curricular civic engagement programs on campus.

The understanding of race and ethnicity on United States college and university campuses is often incorporated into diversity courses and co-curricular options. Connecting the influence of diversity experiences on civic outcomes in HEIs is a topic that researchers have begun to expand on as it takes on various approaches and recognizes the influence of the effects of race, gender, and family income as well as campus structures of diversity and students involvement in diversity experiences (Bowman, 2011). For instance, Cole and Zhou (2013) found that when students are involved in service-learning, have interracial interactions, and are involved in racial awareness workshops on campus with racial harmony, these experiences positively contribute to students' civic mindedness. In their study, Cole and Zhou (2013) sampled 2,429 students (55% White versus 47% non-White) found that there was a significant and positive link between all diversity experiences (co-curricular and curricular) and student civic mindedness.

This framing of civic mindedness at institutions of higher education is important to note because of the historical ways that institutions uphold White normative standards (Dancy et al., 2018; Jones, 2020). This possible connection is most visible in the literature surrounding the impact of diversity courses and civic engagement (Castellanos & Cole, 2015; Chapman-Hilliard

et al., 2020; Cole & Zhou, 2013). With researchers supporting the findings of Cole and Zhou (2013), there is an indication in the literature that diversity courses have a consistent and positive effect on students' civic outcomes (Castellanos & Cole, 2015). Bowman (2011) found that the relationship between college diversity experiences and civic engagement increased civic attitudes, behavioral intentions, and interpersonal interactions with racial diversity in co-curricular and curricular settings. In Bowman's study, the types of civic outcomes (i.e., attitudes, skills, behaviors, and intentions) along with types of diversity experiences (i.e., curricular, cocurricular, and interpersonal interactions) were seen to have a positive significance with  $p = .96$ .

Similarly, Denson and Bowman (2013) explored university diversity experiences and its relationship with intergroup attitudes and civic engagement in a global context. The researchers conducted their study at one Australian university and found that high-quality engagement with curricular diversity activities (provided by the university) and diverse peers resulted in improved intergroup attitudes and civic engagement outcomes. However, research is still developing on the depth and type of these diversity courses and experiences affect students of color at universities. Castellanos and Cole (2015), in a study sample of 404 students (72% White and 28% students of color) at a research university located in a metropolitan city, found that student background characteristics of high school grade point average, race, and precollege civic engagement were significant in predicting students' civic engagement. In this same study, the college environment was also attributed to students' civic outcomes. College experiences that were found to promote students' civic engagement involved racial awareness workshops, interracial interactions, and interactions with faculty. In this same setting, it was found that diversity courses that emphasize societal equity had a greater positive effect on students of color as compared to White students in the same setting.

Although Castellanos and Cole (2015) did not go into details of the content of the societal equity courses, Chapman-Hilliard et al. (2020) found that participants who took three or more Black studies courses spent significantly more time engaged in civic activities than their peers. Chapman-Hilliard et al. (2020) indicated the need to support Black emerging adults in their exploration of their identity regarding race, via specific diversity courses (such as Black studies) to expand avenues to promote civic engagement.

With researchers calling for this expansion of diversity courses and its importance to civic outcomes, there is emerging work in understanding the connection between institutional racism and civic engagement. With this erasure of race from HEIs' diversity initiatives, institutions maintain the dominant framework that centers on the White narrative, therefore, impacting the racial positions of non-White groups (Jones, 2020). Without addressing the institutions' role in racism, diversity efforts on campus (i.e., efforts that lead to civic outcomes), continue to benefit White norms thus causing unclear expectations for the institutions' role in diversity and civic engagement (Jones, 2020). The consequences for this inaction can be seen when White students center diversity as income class, military status and thus affecting their civic growth. Institutional administrators also need to acknowledge race when there is a lack of racial/ethnic gender identify among student, staff, and faculty, as these interactions also shape the experiences of student civic outcomes and construction of civic knowledge (Jones, 2020; Museus et al., 2017; Turner, 2013). When institutions endorse stronger concepts around race, they can directly benefit from a climate on campus where students are more civically engaged (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2020).

### **3.0 Chapter 3: Improvement Project**

This improvement project was aimed to understand the way civic mindedness is conceptualized by students of color at the University of Pittsburgh. The aim was justified by the exclusionary approach of civic engagement programs sponsored by PittServes, as these programs do not reflect cultural components of engagement through race or ethnicity. The theory of improvement for this project was the definition of civic mindedness, knowledge and involvement resulting in action, (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010) should be reevaluated and expanded to reflect the influence of co-curricular civic experiences and racial-ethnic student organization participation. It was with this new understanding of civic mindedness that programs and services offered through the Office of PittServes can be reflective of the needs of students of color. The assumption was that overall student civic mindedness on campus will improve when students of color are included in the institution's commitment to their civic identity.

In this project, I intended to extend current frameworks of civic mindedness and their use in higher education. In the current understandings of this civic outcome, the theoretical and conceptual framework of civic mindedness included how service-learning might work to improve students' civic engagement; further propelling this stance is rhetoric that well-designed service-learning courses will help propel democracy in society through ongoing civic engagement (Battistoni, 2013; Bringle et al., 2017). I aimed to extend Pitt's understanding of civic mindedness by including the experiences of students of color and the ways they engaged civically in campus activities. By the use of qualitative research method, the understanding of civic mindedness by students of color can be judged on a different criterion that allows the qualities of the work to be perused on its own terms (Jones et al., 2013). By using qualitative research, I was also able to

account for the influence of critical theories such as critical race theory (CRT) and LatCrit, a theory that emerges from CRT with the additional focus of Latino/a pan-ethnicity, Spanish language and experiences of immigration.

The predications for this improvement project found that the current understanding of civic mindedness is not reflective of students of color understanding of their own civic engagement development and civic mindedness. This is a reflective of a larger issue in research and current forms of measurement in student civic activities. The theory of improvement was guided by one inquiry question: How do students of color conceptualize civic mindedness?

### **3.1 Change Idea**

To test the theory of improvement, I conducted an interactive focus group session with the goal of conceptualizing a unique definition of civic mindedness for students of color. With no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiries (see Jones et al., 2013) I recruited 10 undergraduate students of color at Pitt as this number can provide perspectives for the purpose of the project and methodological approach (see Jones et al., 2013). In considering a research design, I considered various elements of epistemology (constructivist), theoretical perspective and methodology (narrative inquiry) and methods (see Jones et al., 2013). I particularly sought the use of the constructivist perspective because it brings to the forefront the voices and experiences of participants whose stories have been underrepresented in research (see Jones et al., 2013). The narrative inquiry approach was used because it relies on life experiences of the individual and society (see Jones et al., 2013). In considering these elements as integrally related to each other, I also used an exploratory case study design (see Yin, 2015) as part of the first of several plan-study-

do-act (PDSA) cycles. To accomplish this early-stage design I collected data using three focus groups with current students of color who were engaged civically. Students were recruited, screened, consented, and enrolled in the study in March 2022.

### **3.2 Recruitment**

Participants in this improvement project were recruited via emails sent to members of various PittServes programs and student organizations such as: Black Action Society, Latinx Student Association, Aquarius, RISE, African Student Organization, Black Loud and Queer, Akshaya Patra, and Steel City Raas (see Appendix A). This email also included a request to attend a general body meeting to recruit additional participants as needed. A flyer providing information on project purpose was also distributed with this email and included a uniform resource locator for screening (see Appendix B).

After recruitment, students were screened to ensure they met the following criteria: (a) a current sophomore, junior, or senior student at the University's main campus; (b) identified as a Non White individual; (c) member of at least one student organization that serves racial/ethnic students; (d) participated in at least one civic engagement co-curricular program during college; (e) enrolled at least half time during the 2021–2022 academic year; and (f) at least 18 years old. Students who met the class standing criteria of sophomores, juniors, and seniors were a part of this change idea because they would have completed at least one academic year at the university, thus I was able to assess at least 1 year of their civic experiences on campus prior to the campus shut down in March 2019 due to COVID-19, which may have affected student's ability to be engaged civically. Once at least 10 students were found eligible via the screening process (questions via

email that asked for inclusion and exclusion criteria, see Appendix A), I conducted the consent process. The consent process was done the same day as the screening via Qualtrics (see Appendix B).



### **3.2.1 Pre-Focus Group Data Collection**

Once students were confirmed to be eligible for participation, they were asked to complete a demographic survey via Qualtrics (see Appendix C). Students were also asked to respond to two preliminary questions as part of the demographic survey.

- With your own understanding of civic engagement and considering your own civic journey, how have you taken action to make the world a better place?
- When you think of a person who is very civically engaged what does that person do? How do they act? What do you think is their motivation?

### **3.3 Focus Group Discussion**

During the focus groups (conducted via Zoom platform), there was a guided conversation where students concluded with a group definition of civic mindedness. As the moderator, I utilized Kruger and Casey's (2014) tools of planning for the focus group study (i.e., mental preparation and pre-session strategy). At the end of this interactive focus group, participants completed a post survey with reflective questions (see Appendix E). During each focus groups, I adhered to the recommended pattern of introducing the discussion, which included: (a) welcome, (b) overview of topic, (c) ground rules, and (d) first activities (see Kruger & Casey, 2014). By following this pattern of introduction of each group, I was also able to create trust and respect, showing my ability to care and communicate a deep commitment to understanding the participants experiences (see Jones et al., 2013).

The focus group protocol consisted of various prompted questions used to solicit discussion, reflection and critical thinking how to conceptualize civic mindedness. During the discussion of these questions, I used Kruger and Casey's (2014) use of the pause and probe technique to draw additional information for the group participants. This protocol was semistructured, which provided a structure where each participant was able to contribute to the discussion. During the focus group discussions, there were several times participants exhibited moments of agreement through head nodding and humor (see Krueger & Casey, 2014),

### **3.4 Post Reflection**

After each focus groups concluded, each student was contacted 1 day later via online post survey form (see Appendix E) to assess their input on the definition of civic mindedness compared to the focus group definition and the Bringle and Steinberg (2010) definition. The reflection questions were as follows.

1. What does civic mindedness mean to you now? How does this meaning align with your definition from the focus group or from Bringle and Steinberg (2010)?
2. What future actions do you plan to take to continue your civic journey?

### **3.5 Sample**

Fifteen students indicated interest in participating in this improvement project; however, 11 individual undergraduate students consented to participate. These 11 students met the selection

criteria were invited to participate, and 10 students accepted the invitation with one student declining due to limited availability. All 10 participants were Pitt undergraduate students all in the age range of 20–22 years old. All 10 participants identified as a student of color with various race/ethnicities. All 10 participants were active members of at least one BIPOC student organization; fifty percent of the student participants represented the School of Arts & Sciences while 20% represented the College of General Studies and other groups comprised of School of Computing and Information, Engineering, Education and School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. Ninety percent of participants worked part-time, and 30% were first generation college students. Fifty percent of the group identified as Pell grant eligible. Almost half of the participants had both parents born outside of the United States while others had both parents born in the United States. All focus groups occurred via Zoom platform and ranged from 37–65minutes, all recordings, transcriptions and coded data are privately filed and confidential. I completed this data collection to adhere to the three principles upon all qualitative sampling is dependent including: (a) excellent research skills that create more targeted content for focus group discussions in order to influence and contextualize the quality of the data, (b) locate excellent participants who are familiar with Pitt civic engagement programs, and (c) sampling techniques that are guided by elements of the purpose of the study and inquiry question (Jones et al., 2013). See Table 1 for a summary of the participants.

**Table 1 Participants' Demographic Data**

Participant	Age	First generation	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Part time work?	Student Organization
Mary	20	Yes	Female	Hispanic/Latinx/Mexican	Yes	Latinx Student Association
Sam	20	Yes	Male	African	Yes	Black Action Society, African Student Association
Deion	21	No	Female/Woman	African American	Yes	RISE
Jeffrey	20	No	Male	Black/African American	No	Black Action Society
Thomas	20	No	Male	Black	No	Black Action Society, Black Loud and Queer Akshaya
Felicia	21	No	Female	South Asian	Yes	Patra
Vicky	22	No	Female	Asian- Indian	Yes	Steel City Raas, Taaza
Kelley	21	No	Female	Black/African American	Yes	Black Action Society
Bobbi	21	No	Female	Asian/Cambodian-American	Yes	AQUARIUS
Candace	21	Yes	Woman	Black	Yes	Black Action Society

### 3.5.1 Data Analysis

I deidentified data collected during this improvement project with no linkage to the participants' individual demographic information. This information is stored on a password protected device and an encrypted cloud platform. The technology used was One Drive and Qualtrics. Pseudonyms were used to keep the confidentiality of the participants. These results were stored in the cloud. Original files of the raw data were retained to maintain consistency and integrity in the analysis. Original data are kept in password-protected Microsoft Word and Excel documents.

Connecting the inquiry question to the responses was the main approach of the process of consolidating the data to make it meaningful. I used the CMG construct (Steinberg et al., 2008) as reference point for understanding the data. However, it did not influence or serve as a deductive coding measure. I recorded each interview and transcribed it to code recurring themes and nuances in each participant response. The coding process involved iterative and consolidated themes and patterns. I used a combination of open and description coding to properly summarize words and phrases (see Saldaña, 2011). The descriptive coding approach helped me to understand coding as a first-time coder using a key words for future cross-reference (see Saldaña, 2011). Descriptive coding helped me to differentiate codes as topics and separate the content of the message (see Saldaña, 2011). By using this approach, I was able to listen and notice the similarities and differences as well as notable comments from participants. Utilizing precoding techniques, I paid attention to “codable moments” and preliminary jotting during the focus groups. During my first iteration of coding, I found similar themes across all focus groups, creating a list of subtopics that I wanted to explore. However, it was not until four to six coding cycles later that I distilled these subtopics into categories that I was able to detect emergent patterns. The descriptive coding method was the best approach for my assessment because the responses of the focus groups was necessary for content analysis and evaluation (see Saldaña, 2016).

### **3.6 Limitations**

Multiple limitations existed pertaining to this improvement project. For instance, during the recruitment process, I relied heavily on email communication and the correctness/up to date email addresses of the student organizations’ listservs that contain the contact information for

students of color. The approach of this improvement project was also limited by the involvement of students of color who are members of organizations that serve their racial/ethnic identities, thus excluding the experiences of other students of color that may not be involved in these specific organizations. My positionality as a staff member in civic engagement programming at the university also limited my reach to students who are not involved in civic engagement. Lastly, this improvement project was conducted after the recent global unrest of racial injustices toward Black bodies and a global pandemic, which may have limited students' desires to participate.

### **3.7 Epistemology & Reflexivity**

I believe knowledge is a constant and ever-changing structure that begins during childhood but can change over time due to influences and exposures to various environments. However, I believe that the perspective of this knowledge is constructed by one's social identities such as race and culture. Race and culture are elements I believe are foundational to how individuals interact and receive knowledge from the world.

As an immigrant woman of color, from Guyana, South America, I understand knowledge from the world through the lens of my gender and physical racial identity. As someone with observable physical characteristics that are seen as Black, I interact with the world around me most of the time with just this one representation of my many social identities. As a multicultural and racially mixed person, living in the city of Pittsburgh, I have also found it difficult to share and celebrate these identities as well as my immigrant status as Pittsburgh is a city that is mostly composed of individuals who are White and African American.

This background informed my improvement project and data plan because I attended the University of Pittsburgh as a 17 year old student who recently immigrated to the United States and was desperately seeking belonging. As part of my undergraduate experience at the University of Pittsburgh, I became actively involved in several student organizations that served racial/ethnic students such as Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority Incorporated, the Caribbean, and Latin American Student Association, and the African Student Organization. It was from my experience in these groups that I was able to gain some experience and skills that developed my civic identity. After graduating, I continued to be an active member of various social justice organizations that served people of color, continuing the civic engagement practices I learned from undergraduate. Becoming a naturalized American citizen in July 2012 and voting in my first election for President Barack Obama was another unforgettable occasion in my civic engagement journey.

However, upon becoming a community engagement professional in higher education, I realized that experiences of students of color who hold multiple identities, like myself were not reflected in the programmatic content and civic engagement structures. It was not until my development as a working professional and reflection on my own lived experiences that I realized the influence of the White normative structures present in higher education and the effects of how student civic participation is understood. Thus, I believe as a researcher I am in a unique position to share the value of racial and ethnic identities in the development of students' civic outcomes.

## **4.0 Chapter 4: Findings**

With this inquiry, I sought to understand the way civic mindedness was conceptualized by undergraduate students of color at the University of Pittsburgh. In this chapter, I describe the findings that emerged from focus groups and surveys with 10 participants. The analysis produced two major themes, which included: (a) the influences on civic engagement and civic-mindedness for students of color and (b) a new definition of civic-mindedness and civic leaders created by students of color. Specifically, participants talked about how civic engagement was part of early lived experience and described the role of various communities and organizations in their civic development. While there are variations in each participant's experiences with civic engagement, there are also many similarities. As part of the focus groups, participants were asked to develop a new definition of civic mindedness, which I share in this chapter along with the skills and values for civic individuals that students conceptualized.

### **4.1 Influences on Civic Engagement and Civic Mindedness**

Civic mindedness is increased through the predisposition of social networks that influence civic behavior (Porterfield, 2016). Data showed that the preconditions of social networks that foster civic behavior was the most influential factor in the participants' conceptualization of civic-mindedness in their current life and the construction of a group definition of civic-mindedness. Religion, social groups, and family experiences were all contributing factors to civic mindedness. Place and space were also influential.



### 4.1.1 Role of Religion

The earliest memories of civic engagement practices were seen in early childhood by participants who identified as Black/African American and Latinx as opposed to participants who identified as South Asian Indian and Asian American. These participants shared their early civic engagement experiences as being tied primarily to religious organizations. Although most participants shared a relationship of an understanding of civic-mindedness through religious affiliations some participants went a step further, connecting religious practices to civic-minded behaviors. Thomas, (Black male, junior) stated,

Growing up in a Jamaican immigrant household one thing that was big for us was church; from what I have seen this was a communal experience. Here people donated money to build a church, people made these initiatives happen, it was such a communal experience. [It] made me want to help in some capacity.

Thomas' experience with civic engagement was directly tied to his perception of the role of religious practices and the individual responsibility toward collective action. This experience was like that of other participants.

James, (Black/African American male, senior), spoke of his civic engagement experience through religion stating,

I have had a civic journey probably all my life. I come from a family-oriented background where my great grandmother had her church, where I would go and feed the homeless every month, starting in the fifth grade and continuing in college. I would say this is the start of my civic journey.

Candace, (Black woman, senior) also shared that her civic-minded behaviors were influenced by religious participation. She shared,

When I was younger, I was consistently volunteering at the church because my mother was a part of the church leadership. I went to church with her every Sunday so I would help set up new members' programs. This was how I learned to consistently engage with the community.

For these participants, the influence of religious organizations and frequent participation showcased connections to community responsibilities at a very young age, which influenced their behaviors and understanding of civic engagement before their college enrollment.

However, not all participants agreed that religion provided a path for civic-minded behaviors. Felicia (South Asian woman, senior) stated that her childhood was not very religious thus there was a separation between the religious community and civic involvement. She stated,

I think I've had a little bit of a different path. When I was younger, I don't think, my parents were involved in the community because they were not very religious people so we didn't have a religious community to do community service. When we did do community service it was through school, and I liked it.

For some participants, religious spaces did not personify civic-minded behaviors; for instance, Vicky (Asian woman of Indian decedent, senior) described the volunteer activities of her mother in their Hindu temple as one not civically engaged but religious. She said, "She also does a lot of volunteer work at our temple, but I wouldn't consider that civic engagement because it is much more of a religious thing than serving the community." These participants suggested that religious practices may or may not have an impact on how civic engagement behaviors are learned but rather an act of self-actualization, personal motivation or altruism; however, when an interaction between the religious groups and larger society is demonstrated there exists a

connection to a civic behavior that some of these participants perceived as a civic engagement practice.

#### **4.1.2 Role of Social Groups**

Membership and belonging to social groups were very evident in most of the participants' reflections and understanding of civic engagement. James stated that his membership in a local Black male mentoring group greatly influenced how he viewed his role in society.

I was a part of a mentoring program called Boyz to Men. The guys that ran it were grown Black men; I was their intern and facilitated the programming. Here I was able to see civic engagement working because I was able to connect to other inner-city Black men who came from the same situation as me.

These memberships were also very present at a young age. For Kelley (Black woman, junior), Girl Scouts provided this experience, stating, "When I think about my civic engagement journey for me it started very young I was a Girl Scout for seven years, and so giving back to my community has always been something I have done."

For Betty (Black woman, junior) the influence of civic engagement in social groups came through membership in a program for Black women and girls in her hometown of Philadelphia. She stated,

For me it didn't start with community service, for me it was mentorship. I was a part of something called the uniquely Youth Summit, a Philadelphia nonprofit that seeks to create a safe space for Black women. I remember those times as pivotal times to help me focus on my passions because I am an artist, and my muse is the Black woman. So, mentorship inspires my need for civic engagement.

Candace also credited her membership in a social organization as one that influenced her civic mindedness, stating, “It wasn’t until my sophomore [year], and I was in the Black Action Society (an undergraduate student organization), I began to tutor at a nonprofit. While tutoring consistently I realized the impact of frequent civic engagement.” There is no denying the influence of social groups in shaping the civic-mindedness conceptualization of some of the participants.

#### **4.1.3 Family Experiences**

When participants began to explore family dynamics and structures related to civic engagement, particular practices and values began to emerge. For Sam (Black/African, male, junior) his experience in civic engagement was very connected to his family practices, stating, “Ever since I’ve been young, like me and my mother has always given back, whether it is with the church or going to DC on our own giving back to the homeless or less fortunate.”

For four participants who identified as bilingual and first-generation students, cultural practices, and language differences were discussed as barriers to their understanding of their civic engagement. Bobbi (a Cambodian American woman, senior) was able to reference her upbringing with non-English-speaking parents and how they engaged civically. Bobbi stated,

Weirdly, I think my parents were civically active but not engaged. They voted and did things in the neighborhood because they saw other people doing it without understanding what it meant because it was law-abiding. They were afraid that not doing this would get them sent back to their country.

Statements such as this may indicate cultural/global differences in the participation of civic activities, thus viewing these acts as a mandate to govern as opposed to actions that may influence political systems. Perceptions such as this were also shared by another bilingual participant, Mary

(Hispanic/Latinx/Mexican woman, sophomore) whose family expressed their civic engagement practices by offering community service through their family grocery store for other Mexican immigrant families. Mary also viewed non-English languages as a barrier to civic engagement, while also yearning for a connection to nonwhite spaces to practice civic engagement. She said,

I was hoping for someone that was Latina so we can go to LSA (Latinx Student Association) meetings together. I wanted to immerse myself in the Pittsburgh community and to make more of an impact and find the Pittsburgh Latinos; I found very few Pitt Latinos, but where are the Pittsburgh Latinos?

When asked about her civic journey, Mary shared that her experiences lead her to advocate against whiteness and assimilation by stating,

My hometown has a very small population of Latinos, so when I was speaking up against things I would get reactions from White people, like who does she think she is. A lot of Black and Brown people were very quiet and assimilated, and I never was. I just never was a part of that group, so I just found my way by immersing myself more in my culture and making my motives based on that.

Contributing to this thought, Vicky spoke of her own family civic experiences as not being significant because of whiteness. Vicky mentioned that her father only concerns himself with Indian politics and yet fails to see the connection to a civic movement that involves other people of color.

Vicky shared,

My father would say about social issues don't worry about it if it doesn't affect you. My father thinks if it doesn't affect the Indian community, it doesn't impact me. I didn't want

to be this way, that's why I got involved with civic engagement I wanted to break out of that mindset I saw in the Indian communities.

The role of the family in the lived experiences of some participants is apparent when discussing the intergenerational role models of those who they perceive as civic-minded individuals. For Betty, her mother and father have exemplified civic-minded behaviors as stewards of the community, involving themselves as outlets of support for young people in her neighborhood. She said,

My dad helped start a football program and he was a coach for about 10 years plus. All that coaching was done for free, and the kids call him pops/dad because he serves as a father figure. Stepping into a fatherhood role for people that aren't his children. My mom is a huge influence on me, she does a lot of free therapy sessions, so in her way, she does a lot of civic engagement. That's just a different way to be civically involved.

Similarly, other participants shared that their parents also have shaped their understanding of civic mindedness including how they view their choice extracurricular activities in college. Thomas shared how his Jamaican parents influenced how he viewed formal learning and how it shows up in his civic mindedness.

Thomas stated,

Education is so prized in my family. My mom and dad always say all that matters is education. For this reason, I wanted to tutor kids so I can impart what I could. This helped me to find ways (including through education) to engage civically.

Kelly shared that her aunt's medical experience also shaped how she understands civic-minded behaviors and motivation, stating, "My aunt is an executive director of clinics in predominately Black communities, her biggest motivation is wanting to help people and wanting

to make sure they have access, acting with a lot of compassion and empathy.” Various family experiences (differing in many ways) were mentioned by all participants, thus showing the impact of familial spaces in the role of an individual’s civic mindedness, yet there were difference in how each participant conceptualized civic mindedness.

#### **4.1.4 Influence of Places & Spaces**

All participants noted the role and influence of place in shaping their engagement in civic mindedness. Places included geographical spaces and university sponsored programs. Participants believed that community connection was of great importance when conceptualizing civic mindedness, many of which occurred in these places and spaces.

#### **4.1.5 Geographical Places**

Mary, Felicia, and James all mentioned the influence of their geographical locations in connecting them to civic engagement practices. Each one of these participants shared how their hometowns’ geographical demographics shaped their connection and frequency to their civic engagement behaviors. Both Mary and Felicia shared that because of the geographic location of their hometowns, there was not a lot of diversity, thus very few cultural/racial civic engagement opportunities to share with a community. However, James grew up in Philadelphia’s inner city. He shared that because of this geographical location, he was able to easily form connections to the Pittsburgh Black community because of his shared experiences in the “inner city” when he was part of a local mentoring program in Pittsburgh.

James shared,

The inner-city background is a different ball game. We grow up with education at the back of our heads, we are just trying to make it out. So being that these kids come from the same situation (inner-city living), this was what drove me to them and the program.

This disparity of experiences in geographical locations was discussed by Vicky, Felicia, Sam, Betty, James and Mary in various capacities. This discussion highlighted the need for civic engagement opportunities primarily for people of color and the benefits of having these opportunities in geographical locations where people of color reside.

Betty stated that due to her upbringing in an urban setting she was able to learn more about civic engagement through a university partnership. She said, “In high school, I did an internship with Temple University called Power, which helped me to do a documentary that focused on issues that affected the Black and Latino.” However, some participants still wanted more from their geographical spaces in providing these civic engagement opportunities.

Bobbi shared in her post-reflection survey,

This summer, I hope to try to be engaged back home somehow, and then when I come back to Pitt, I want to find ways to be a good community member the neighborhood I live and get to know the area so I can see how best I can serve.

## **4.2 Co-Curricular Programs/Spaces**

Attending Pitt was a catalyst for seven participants in expanding, connecting, or consistently participating in civic-minded programming. These participants noted that while they had prior exposure to civic engagement activities or practice civic engagement behaviors, it was their attendance and participation in university community co-curricular activities that provided



them a path for civic mindedness. Bobbi stated, “Coming to the University of Pittsburgh helped me to communicate to the communities I want to serve.” Sam noted, “PittServes events keep me busy while I am at school and that is how I have taken to make the world a better place.” Felicia also shared similar sentiments about this office saying, “I knew I wanted to be involved in the community through PittServes so I can gain different perspective and learn.” Taking this a step further, Vicky shared that her involvement as a student tutor exposed her to training around cultural competency that enlightened her to, “want to do something more and have constructive conversations about race.”

The influence of student organizations was also discussed as all participants were members of a university recognized racial/ ethnic student organization. Despite this observation, only three participants spoke of their student organization membership during the interviews. Kelley and Candace, both members of the Black Action Society, shared their student organization experience as a connection to a like-minded community with the university, a group in which they both hold leadership roles. Mary also spoke of her membership in the Latinx Student Association, to which she sees the space as a refuge for her cultural identity and a vehicle to connect her to local Pittsburgh Latinx initiatives.

There was a noticeable absence of academic connections to civic mindedness, even though 50% of participants are in the School of Arts & Sciences, a unit that offers various courses connected to civic and community engagement. There was no mention of past courses that aided their civic engagement journey nor did any participant share academic initiatives such as research grants and transcript distinction as motivations for their civic engagement experiences in college. Sam did reflect on this academic connection in the post-survey, stating, “Though I feel there aren’t many opportunities in undergrad I still want to be active and get people in my academic program

genuinely interested in being civically involved.” This misconnection to academic areas was also mentioned by Jeffrey who wants to take further action on their civic journey by joining a student organization focused on public service, an academic major in the School of General Studies.

### **4.3 Definitions of Civic Mindedness**

Participants were asked to construct a shared definition of civic mindedness based on the discussions in the focus groups. Sam (community at the forefront of mind), Candace (knowing those that you serve), Kelly (multifaceted), and Bobbi (never too late to be civically engaged) all constructed their definitions; a decision that they thought was best to reflect the growing understanding of civic-mindedness and was representative of the individual voice. Bobbi asked, “is civic-mindedness a noun or adjective? I think it is something that you can do or affect the larger community. Civic mindedness is always community-oriented, but it is also active.” This approach to constructing a definition converged on the shared understanding of community (though this group consisting of Sam, Bobbi, and Candace did not define the term), as well as the convergence of a collective approach to civic mindedness. They conceptualized this term as not individual action but a collective one.

Another group ( Mary, Felicia, Vicky and Deion) constructed a definition that focused on individual connection to the larger society/community. This group defined civic mindedness as intentionality, use of passions and talents, and forming meaningful connections with other to create unity. This definition shows that these group participants value purposeful civic engagement through thoughtful actions and selflessness. One group member, Mary added to the definition to “build a united communal front.” Another group member, Vicky added “passion can also be a

large motivating factor for civic engagement.” Upon completion of the post-survey, Mary also added to the definition “an individual can be a part of many different types of communities at a time, but it is up to them on which ones they want to put the most or least time into.”

The final group (Thomas and Jeffrey) created a definition in a graphical presentation (see Table 2), with civic mindedness at the core center of their image. Branches to this core were messages such as bridge gaps, awareness of the role, and something bigger and catalyzing for community change. This process was refined into a structural sentence: “Awareness of their role in something bigger than themselves. Awareness catalyzing for change in the community, they organize community efforts to fill community efforts.” One group member, Thomas, later added to his post-reflection survey, “Civic mindedness I think can be a catalyst for larger systemic changes that are liberatory and have that initial mindset for local, communal change is necessary for change on a much larger scale.”

These definitions constructed by these participants all share the influence of their understanding of civic engagement behaviors, values, and practices as influenced by their environment and the examples others set forth for them. The definitions are largely collective-focused and aim to support, and work alongside the community and with an active or continuous awareness or progress in learning.

**Table 2 Group Definitions for Civic Mindedness**

Group	Civic mindedness is:
1	Awareness of their role in something bigger than themselves. Awareness catalyzing for change in the community, they organize community efforts to fill community efforts.
2	Being community- oriented, knowing the people/community you're serving. Being compassionate and advocating for the community. Actively ongoing. Community oriented, knowing the people/community you are serving. Fluid
3	Intentionality, use of passions and talents, forming meaningful connections with other to create unity

#### **4.4 Skillsets and Values**

Conceptualizing and defining civic mindedness also meant a shared reflection on the skills and values that a civically minded individual would need to possess. Participants shared several character traits that can further an individual's civic-minded development that further enhances the definitions they developed. Leadership traits became visible in these discussions as those who worked directly in community settings saw local leaders as a source of connection for change efforts. Participants saw these community leaders as trusted sources and knowledgeable about community activities. Kelly noted that her example of a community leader “knows all the kids by name and asks about their families.” Felicia also said that these leaders are consistently seeking new knowledge and want to connect information.

Participants also saw networking and resourcefulness as important skills to possess for a civically minded individual. Vicky, Mary, and Betty all noted that a civic-minded individual connects culture to their impact creating spaces and connections for appreciation and inclusion. Dion stated that her father uses his barber shop for the community while also serving as the church football coach, modeling as a father figure for young African Americans in the community. Similarly, both Vicky and Mary expressed cultural artistry outlets as part of the values/skills

needed for civic mindedness. Vicky noted that cultural awareness is also part of civic mindedness, stating, “Indian dance is a creative outlet for kids in the community to appreciate and enjoy. I guess this one form of civic engagement that I have seen.” Mary shared a similar sentiment and saw culture as connected to civic-minded traits as she was highly motivated by the experiences of her family’s Mexican grocery store. Thus, she shared that culture through food is also a trait of those that are civically minded.

The desire to connect personally to a civic-minded person was shared in two of the three group interviews. One group described personality traits where there is care and gentleness while the other group shared a need for an individual to be selfless and have a passion for civic engagement as a lifelong commitment while learning how to support others. These participants all showed that culture, race, and ethnicity all influence their learned behavior and sense of responsibility for others.

Connections with the community were discussed at great lengths in all groups, especially through discussions of civically engaged individuals. Kelly and Candace both noted that community interactions and frequent connections are important. Kelly shared that engaging with the larger Pittsburgh community is a focus of her involvement as a Black Action Society tutor, (an undergraduate student organization) where she interacts consistently with local community leaders.

In referring to a person who is very civically engaged, both Candace and Kelly referred to the same local nonprofit leader who they describe as someone who cares for others. Candace described this leader as someone who exemplifies frequent interpersonal interaction with others.

Candace stated,

She knows the community. When people come to pick up their children, she asks how they are doing, asks personal questions about their lives, and she knows the community she is serving. I think she is very much the person who helps to serve the community by making it better.

Thomas also described his view of a civically minded individual as one in community leadership, such as his neighborhood church pastor. He shared,

One thing he would do is drive the kids in the neighborhood to school and pick them up in his big station wagon. Dropping them off at home or whatever they had to do. This taught me how to be mindful of your community and how you can support them.

The emphasis on community connections was only seen in the examples of civically minded individuals, but also made explicit in the definitions of civic-mindedness as created by each group. Group one defined it as, “Civic mindedness is community-oriented, knowing the people/community you are serving.” Group two defined it as, “Civic mindedness is intentional and unintentional use of your talents and passions as a means of creating community.” Group three defined it as, “Awareness of their role in something bigger than themselves. Awareness catalyzing for change in the community, they organize community efforts to fill community efforts.” These perspectives demonstrate how incorporating community connections to the work of civic engagement is not only responsible work but also leads to progress towards systemic change. James described this care and connection to the community as “community-mindedness,” a concept he termed as a characteristic that someone possesses when they are supporting the larger needs of the community, needs that they are acutely aware of or can anticipate.

## **5.0 Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

In this chapter, I expand upon the findings of the improvement project by providing a discussion of the results and themes that emerged from the analysis. The purpose of this project was to examine the perception of civic mindedness of undergraduate students of color enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh. This inquiry was conducted to understand how students of color at Pitt conceptualize their civic engagement values, behaviors, and motivations for participation in civic engagement activities while enrolled in college. Utilizing the domains of the CMG construct (Steinberg et al., 2008), I investigated how each student defined civic mindedness through connections to their past civic engagement experiences both before and during college. These findings shed light on the experiences of BIPOC students who participate in primarily civic engagement co-curricular activities at Pitt, and what can be understood about how these students conceptualize university provided civic engagement activities and the prerequisites of these activities for a BIPOC student population. The key findings outlined here are most notably connected to things university administrators can do differently in order to provide more support for students of color civic mindedness development.

### **5.1 Key Finding #1: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Student Involvement in Co-Curricular Activities Increase Civic Mindedness**

Participants' understanding of civic mindedness was based on a strong connection to social/cocurricular groups. These experiences were strongly linked to student organization

membership and related extracurricular activities as found in these social groups. These participants heavily relied upon their organizational membership in creating and participating in change efforts that would result in long term civic commitments. The findings were consistent with the literature as racial and ethnic student organization membership promotes civic engagement practices, provides space to strengthen civic commitments and increase civic values and skills post-graduation (see Berkowitz et al., 2017; Bowman et al., 2014; Hemer & Reason, 2017; Janke & Domagal-Goldman, 2017; Kisker et al., 2016).

With a variety of cultural and social capital shared by each participant, particularly through their family and religious upbringing, there was a discussion on the shared similarities of civic engagement practices and behaviors in their various cultures; however, as this realization was acknowledged, there was also a shared agreement that their understanding of civic engagement was shaped by White supremacy culture that promotes supremacy thinking that can be damaging to BIPOC (see Jones & Okun, 2001). As noted by Kuttner (2016), there is a need for a deeper understanding of how BIPOC students must navigate a White normative world, thus changing their understanding of their own civic engagement practices.

Several participants mentioned their student organization as playing a pivotal role in providing opportunities for civic practice and continued behaviors. However, there was no mention of shared efforts between their racial/ethnic student organizations in programmatic collaboration or events. This finding probably indicated a lack of solidarity across racial and ethnic student groups; even after participants acknowledged that these organizations provided opportunities to engage in civic minded practices. Though there is limited information on the benefits or challenges on cross collaboration of BIPOC student groups as it relates to civic engagement, McMillan (2017) indicated that civic mindedness should be developed in a way so that students can interact with



different cultures in appropriate ways. Similarly, Cole and Zhou (2013) found that when students are involved in organizations their experiences positively contribute to their civic mindedness.

Co-curricular volunteer experiences such as civic fellowships, community tutoring, and direct service opportunities positively affect the attitudes related to the students' sense of responsibility, diversity, and global community orientation (see Kirk & Grohs, 2016). In addition, the participants who were involved in these long-term community engaged co-curricular programs were often serving in other leadership capacities in more than one student organization, this is important to note, because it also indicates further development in the student civic mindedness development. Having a cultural representation in co-curricular civic programming was also a finding, as participants often sought to connect their racial and/or ethnic identity to that of the involvement in the co-curricular civic program. Supporting this approach, Garcia and Cuellar (2018) recommended curricular and cocurricular structures that support civic engagement outcomes for Latinx students at Hispanic Serving Institutions.

## **5.2 Key Finding #2: Direct Involvement with Communities of Color in Co-Curricular Programming is Critical**

The participants in this project overwhelmingly agreed that direct involvement and connection to communities of color in their civic experiences at college positively contributed to their civic mindedness. Though the participants had a variety of co-curricular programmatic involvement, all participants shared experiences developed from co-curricular programs that were in communities of color in Pittsburgh. Several participants mentioned the importance of knowing the community members made a difference in how they conceptualized their own civic

engagement journey. These participants often described these individuals in the community as community leaders as well as persons of color. Interactions with these individuals were often seen as the most influential spaces for learning civic mindedness. These experiences not only supplement learnings from the classroom but also give insight into the relationship of the educational institution to that of the community, a takeaway that participants mentioned as important in their experience with co-curricular programs.

Taking this a step further, Candace expressed the importance of knowing the names of the community members to understand and humanize social issues on a community development level. These interpersonal skills were developed when these participants were involved in long term volunteer service programs, often organized by the Office of PittServes, tutoring programs, civic fellowships and/or student organizations. These programs provide experiences that these BIPOC students understood to be long term commitments to understanding community assets, capacity building and social justice. Kirk and Grobs (2016) shared there is a significant influence on student outcomes once student and community contact are increased, including civic and academic outcomes. However, without understanding the frequency, specific community partners and unique experiences related to these interactions there is still more to understand about the influence of community members of color interaction with students of color.

### **5.3 Key Finding #3: Current Civic Mindedness Campus Offerings Insufficient for BIPOC Student Needs**

For BIPOC students, current opportunities for civic mindedness development, falls short of meeting their needs for a wide array of diverse opportunities for cultural and racial civic

engagement. For students who identified as non-Black or non-African American, their experiences of civic mindedness on campus were primarily through their cultural and ethnic group membership such as a South Asian Dance Club. For students who are multilingual, their understanding of civic mindedness were related to non-English languages and cultural practices such as cultural community gatherings, in which civic mindedness were exemplified through values of community and social justice awareness. The students who were members of BIPOC student organizations shared that current programming and civic engagement activities offered by the university, sometimes create barriers for language representation as well as connection and representation of non-Christian faiths. These students particularly noted a need to connect their civic experiences in college to that of their multigenerational households and local community. Alcantar (2022) noted that for Latinx students to thrive civically, they must have environments where there is an integration of the Latinx student background in their higher education experience that reflects a culturally responsive and student-centered approach.

For a few participants (Felicia, Mary and Vicky) because of the lack of campus connections to their ethnic and/or racial identity, they did not immediately connect their prior civic experiences to that of civic mindedness, mostly due to their interpretation that civic engagement would not include elements of their own cultural familiarity or representation. This may take the form of BIPOC students redefining affinity spaces where their cultural identity and civic mindedness (such as the Black Action Society and Latinx Student Association) can be centered as they navigate challenges as college students in a white dominant culture.

## **5.4 Recommendations for Practice**

The key recommendations that emerged from this improvement project informs several implications for practice for the Office of PittServes to support the development of BIPOC student civic mindedness. These key recommendations include: (a) recognize institutional community partners as co-educators in student learning, (b) implement institutional wide culturally responsive civic co-curricular programming, and (c) create BIPOC student organization resources and infrastructures for civic programming.

### **5.4.1 Recommendation #1: Recognize BIPOC Community Partners as Co-Educators in Student Learning**

The findings of this inquiry suggest that BIPOC students value the learnings and teachings of community partners who are active participants in their co-curricular civic experience. They shared that these experiences connected them to community leaders that they would not have otherwise known. These leaders provided these students with teachings not found in the classroom and shared with them the power of collective change while creating on the ground efforts for social justice.

Currently, there are several co-curricular programs that focus on civic engagement at Pitt that have an element of community partner involvement; however, not all of these programs provide community partners with shared agency or creative input into student learning outcomes. At the Office of PittServes, there are seven student civic engagement programs that provide long term engagement with BIPOC community members. However, each one of these programs provide different levels of involvement from community partners with no cohesive partnership

involvement. Some of these programs only provide partners with roles such as advisory board members, site supervisors, and point of contacts for student projects. There is also no database where there is an inventory of skillset, interest, or diverse representation of current community partner contacts, an important tool that could be used to serve BIPOC student interest and provide ongoing data for measure of BIPOC student engagement and community partnership. Only one of these programs in the Office of PittServes (i.e., Black Youth Connection) provides students, specifically BIPOC students, with equal community partner involvement in curriculum building and learning outcomes.

As the director of the Office of PittServes, I recommend the creation of a community partner database where individual partner/organization skillsets, interest, racial and ethnic representation can be assessed in order to match BIPOC student interest in programming. Such an inventory can aid developing intentional programming that connects BIPOC students' interest to skilled and BIPOC community partners to cultivate civic values, skills, and learning that is appropriate and advances BIPOC student needs. By having BIPOC community partners contribute the civic mindedness of students learning, there is a creation of opportunities for deliberative dialogue, an approach that reclaims civic life for all citizens (Britt & Smithberger, 2018). As co-creators, BIPOC community partners can share their rich knowledge and understanding of the civic landscape of a neighborhood, thus sharing with students the best practices and outcomes for successful and sustainable community engagement through listening and discovery (Britt & Smithberger, 2018).

When BIPOC community partners are seen as creators of training curriculum design and implementation, this creates an opportunity to further the university's commitment to justice and antiracism practices. This incorporation also provides representation and encouragement to

BIPOC student civic engagement experiences. To integrate community partners into student trainings, I would first explore the current PittServes place based student programming and gain the perspectives and inputs from these existing community partners, particularly BIPOC partners. Utilizing the frameworks of place based community engagement to fully maximize university and community resources for lasting change efforts (see Yamamura & Koth, 2018), I would evaluate our current programming based on the exploration, development, and sustaining phase of this framework. While considerations for staffing capacity as well as financial support would need to be incorporated into this change, I recommend that Student Affairs senior leadership increase funding support in order to equity compensate BIPOC community partners for their time and commitment to co-creating student training curriculums; a direct connection to the strategic institutional plan that demands action related to expanding opportunities for civic and global engagement (the Plan for Pitt, 2022).

#### **5.4.2 Recommendation #2: Implement Culturally Responsive Civic Engagement Co-Curricular Programming**

Creating mediums of representation of culturally responsive co-curricular programming in civic engagement goes beyond nonperformative actions such as BIPOC student pictures in recruitment flyers, quotes or pictures, it must be a strategic implementation that is connected to institutional goals. To create responsible representation of BIPOC civic engagement programming, I recommend that university offices that engage in student civic programs, such as the Office of PittServes, create direct and sustainability partnerships with religious organizations, BIPOC student groups and academic social change programs, as a means to incorporate awareness, and understanding for culturally relevant programming while also explicitly providing a connection to

institutional racial commitments. Currently, the Office of PittServes programs have a direct service component in communities of color, low income, or rural; however, these programs often operate separately from the larger institutional conversations and discussions related to cultural representation and student programming, including BIPOC student groups. Due to this separation, these programs can reinforce White privilege, color-blind racism, neo-colonialism, white savior complex, and white supremacy (Rost-Banik, 2018).

Without culturally relevant programming, students of color in civic engagement programs are often left to explore their role in concepts of race, class, power and oppression and community in a different way than their White peers, thus creating a disconnect from the institutional culture of engagement (Benenson et al., 2017; Maruyama et al., 2018). Additionally, these students' understanding that the service context was already filled with complicated history and a painful past related to their racial/cultural identity, students of color are coming to college with desires and dreams of the cultural communities in which they identify (Maruyama et al., 2018). BIPOC culture and civic engagement history can also be exemplified by creating BIPOC inclusive civic engagement programming in collaboration with BIPOC student organizations that already incorporate civic engagement practices into their mission. In collaboration with BIPOC student organizations, PittServes, as a Student Affairs entity can use its positionality to co-create and support programming with BIPOC student organizations and local BIPOC nonprofit organizations.

I propose the development and expansion of BIPOC culturally relevance spaces of civic engagement in partnership with a local BIPOC lead and centered nonprofit organization. This recommendation would be very similar to the Black Youth Connection (BYC) mentoring program that already exists within PittServes and is in partnership with the Black Action Society and a local

Hill District nonprofit. By expanding such programs, BIPOC students' learning can enhance the cultural knowledge and representation of civic action on campus. The way the BYC was created was through intentional representation limiting the staff, student, and community leadership to that of individuals that identified as part of the African diaspora. This intentional design created long lasting partnership and ensured that diverse staffing was maintained as a condition of the program. Similarly, PittServes can connect the BIPOC community identified civic engagement needs and social causes to that of BIPOC student groups to create public forums on advocacy, fundraising and direct service. For example, the Latinx Student Association can collaborate with Casa San Jose, a local Latino Immigrant resource center, to create ongoing volunteer opportunities that specifically advance the mission of the organization such as tutoring services, phone banking, technology assistance, language translation, and political advocacy.

### **5.4.3 Recommendation # 3: Provide BIPOC Student Organization Resources for Civic**

#### **Programming on Campus**

BIPOC student organizations often struggle with recruitment and retention challenges especially at a PWI. These organizations provide an important function to university commitments and transformation practices for civic engagement; however, these organizations are often under resourced by funding and advising support, there remains a decline in student civic programming and co-curricular offering. Participants shared that the lack of BIPOC students on campus creates challenges to collaborate and find their communities, as some BIPOC students' organizations often go dormant due to lack of membership and representation in programming.

As a leader in the Division of Student Affairs, I recommend a workshop where student advisors of BIPOC student organizations are trained in facilitating culturally responsive student-



centered approaches that support the sustainability of the BIPOC student groups. One method to achieve support of BIPOC student organization civic programming would be to have the BIPOC student groups have an active role in the recruitment and outreach of new students, while also mentoring incoming BIPOC student through civic co-curricular programming. I also recommend that the Student Organization Resource Center plays a central role in continuing support of BIPOC student organizations by providing students with additional funding, marketing/communications support, and opportunities for advocacy in representation in campus and university diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. These BIPOC student organizations would also need to have a direct link to staff/faculty professional organizations (Hispanic and Latino Professional Association, Equipose, etc.) that also provide similar civic engagement outreach opportunities. These connections can also facilitate mentorship and increased social capital that can support recruitment and retention of BIPOC students at Pitt.

### **5.5 Implications for Research**

There is a vast amount of literature about student civic engagement, service learning, and community engaged research and partnerships; however, there is little developing research on the practices and behaviors of BIPOC students relevant to their civic outcomes in PWIs. This inquiry project sought to contribute to the literature by conceptualizing the civic mindedness of BIPOC students at the University of Pittsburgh while uncovering the role community partnerships and student organizations play in their civic mindedness. It is my hope that this inquiry project will further emphasize the urgent need to rethink, reshape, and dismantle the current structures and

systems of the evaluation of student civic outcomes while also encouraging liberatory exploration of BIPOC students through civic participation.

This inquiry also underscores the necessity of community engaged competencies related to commitment to diversity, equity, and justice. However, these commitments cannot be realized without the incorporation of social justice education into student community and civic engagement learning. The findings of this project highlight the need for a justice-oriented approach where students can address social issues and injustices through collective and collaboration action (see Mitchell & Soria, 2018). Researchers seeking to conduct future studies within the discipline of community and civic engagement should seek to further understand the experiences of BIPOC students in relation to their co-curricular learning as well as their membership in racial and cultural student organizations as measures of civic action.

## 6.0 Chapter 6: Reflections on Practice and Process

The process of completing this inquiry project was both rewarding and involved. It was through this process that I was able to rediscover and affirm by values and hope for a future that is justice orientated and liberating. Having completed this inquiry, I plan on reflecting on the findings and discoveries that would help improve the understanding of civic mindedness for students of color. Ideally, the findings as well as the interviews of this inquiry would motivate and celebrate the rich histories, skills, behaviors, and values of BIPOC students who are embracing their civic engagement journey. It was a joy to facilitate and listen to these interviews as the participants shared aspects of their understanding of their identity, family history, and experiences as a collective.

I found that within each group of student interviews, every individual was eager to share their perceptions and insights for the prompted questions and group activity. I was amazed at the insight of some students to connect the actions of their family and communities to examples of civic engagement. Additionally, I felt affirmed in exploring this inquiry when I received comments from students who felt “seen” because no one had ever took the time to ask or explore the connect to their civic engagement and racial/ethnic identity. It was in these comments after the interviews that created complex feelings of disappointment and hope. These students were so excited about the conversation of this inquiry, yet they would no longer be college students once these issues of BIPOC student civic engagement could be addressed. This gave me hope that this inquiry provided the groundwork for beginning to address these issues.

As a department leader and practitioner in student civic engagement, this inquiry has taught me a great deal of the work that is still yet to be done when it comes to responsible incorporation

and representation of BIPOC students in civic engagement co-curricular programs. This has taught me that change is constant, civic engagement is always ongoing, and programs need to be reflective of these changes as well as be responsible stewards of knowledge. It was through this project that I can value the PDSA cycle as tool to expect and seek change in program development and implementation. Understanding that all parts of the PDSA are connected and that intention does not mean guaranteed success, but rather expected responsibility to your objective, is a lesson that was very apprenticed in this process. As a leader, who is also a BIPOC member, my existence in this space requires me to carry an additional sense of responsibility and at times unfair expectations for speedily change. I recognize that I am one of many leaders in a large system that at most times can feel disjointed; however, I am motivated by the encouragement and expressed need for an evaluation of BIPOC civic engagement on campus that can only achieved through the involve of other stakeholders.

Creating a feasible and timely PSDA is also a key takeaway from this project. Through my interviews, I learned that there are large concepts that would take time, resources, and multiple stakeholders to implement. In the programs of PittServes, this would also mean that I would have to have several prerequisites in place before programmatic changes would be made, a process that would include staff training and development as well as resource allocations.

As this inquiry concluded, I am motivated and excited to enter the “Study” and “Act” sections of the PDSA. It is my hope that all BIPOC students at the University of Pittsburgh will have an opportunity to express, celebrate, and learn about how their racial/cultural identity plays a role in their civic mindedness and the significance of community engagement in creating these spaces of learning.

## 6.1 Conclusion

I found that the conceptualization of civic mindedness for BIPOC students is very much linked to their racial and ethnical experiences and understanding of civic values, behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions. key findings, recommendations and implications for research related to the inquiry project were outlined. The key findings of this improvement project were: (a) BIPOC student involvement in co-curricular activities increase civic mindedness, (b) direct involvement with communities of color in co-curricular programming is critical and (c) current civic mindedness campus offerings are insufficient for BIPOC student needs. The recommendations I provided included: (a) recognize BIPOC community partners as co-educators, (b) implement culturally responsive civic engagement co-| programs, and (c) provide BIPOC student organizations resources for civic programming on campus. These changes are important steps to create a campus climate of inclusion and belonging as well as support and to celebrate the partnership and invaluable contributions of our community members.

## **Appendix A: Appendix A: Recruitment and Invitation Email**

**Subject:** The evaluation of civic mindedness of students of color at Pitt: Seeking Participants

Dear Pitt Student,

My name is Shenay Jeffrey and I am the current Assistant Director of the Office of PittServes and a current graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. I am currently seeking participants for my improvement project that focuses on the experiences of the current University of Pittsburgh undergraduate students of color and their civic growth. More information on this study can be found below:

Purpose of Study: I am conducting this study to investigate the role of your racial/ethnic social identities in your decision to participate in civic engagement opportunities on campus, such as membership in this student organization. Current literature on civic outcomes and students of color is limited, thus this research will help to highlight the experiences of students of color and civic engagement in a higher education context. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Participant Expectations: If you are found eligible for this study you will be asked to complete 2 online surveys, one at the beginning of the study and another one at the end. You will also be a part of an information session that will last approx. 30-45 minutes. A select number of participants will be asked to be a part of a 45-minute individual interview. The total commitment

to this study is approx. 3-4 weeks. All study procedures will be conducted online via Zoom and Qualtrics.

Requirements: If you are interested in participating in this study you must meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 18 years old
- A current sophomore, junior or senior student at the University of Pittsburgh main campus
- Identify as a Non-White individual (minoritized racial/ethnic identity)
- Member of at least one organization that serves racial/ethnic students (Black Action Society, Pitt Latinx Student Association, Pitt Pan- Caribbean Alliance, National Panhellenic Council, Sigma Beta Rho Multicultural Fraternity, African Student Organization, Pitt Asian Student Alliance, and Dhirana)
- Participated in at least one civic engagement program
- Enrolled at least half time during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Please note, there is no compensation for participation in this study. If you have any interest in participating in this study and/or have any questions, please reply directly to the email listed below.

Shenay Jeffrey – [sdj24@pitt.edu](mailto:sdj24@pitt.edu)

Thank you in advance,

Shenay

## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND STUDENTS OF  
COLOR AT PITT

# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

For research project investigating the  
civic engagement experiences of  
Students of Color @ Pitt

Students Must:

- identify as a student of color
- Must not be a first year student
- Currently enrolled at the Pittsburgh Campus
- be an member of one or more selected student organization that serves racial/ethnic students

If Interested contact:  
**Shenay Jeffrey**  
*sdj24@pitt.edu*

A small portrait photograph of Shenay Jeffrey, a Black woman with dark curly hair, wearing a green patterned top, smiling against a dark background.

Figure 1 Recruitment Flyer



## Appendix C: Consent Form

**STUDY TITLE:** The Conceptualization of Civic mindedness of students of color at the University of Pittsburgh

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Shenay D. Jeffrey, MPM- 3949 Fifth Ave, 923 William Pitt Union, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260- sdj24@pitt.edu- 412-624-0240

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:** If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to talk to someone other the research team, please call the University of Pittsburgh Human Subjects Protection Advocate toll-free at 866-212-2668.

**SOURCES OF SUPPORT:** There are no sources of support.

**INTRODUCTION;** The purpose of this study is to examine the understanding of civic engagement for students of color by exploring how students of color at Pitt engage civically. A total of 10 undergraduate students of color at Pitt are being asked to participate. You are being asked to participate because you:

- Are at least 18 years old
- A current sophomore, junior or senior student at the University of Pittsburgh main campus
- Identify as a Non-White individual (minoritized racial/ethnic identity)
- Member of at least one organization that serves racial/ethnic students (for example: Black Action Society, Pitt Latinx Student Association, Pitt Pan- Caribbean Alliance, National Panhellenic

Council, Sigma Beta Rho Multicultural Fraternity, African Student Organization, Pitt Asian Student Alliance, and Dhirana

- Participated in at least 1 civic engagement co-curricular program during enrollment

- Enrolled at least half time during the 2021-2022 academic year.

**RESEARCH ACTIVITIES:** To be completed for research purposes only.

1. Your participation will occur during the spring 2022 semester.
2. You will be asked to complete pre and post survey questions along with participation group focus activities.
3. Your participation will last 2 weeks.
  - a. Group focus meeting and pre survey questions (1 week)
  - b. Completion of post survey questions (1 week after)
4. All research activities will take place in a virtual secure format and will be conducted by the Principal Investigator
5. Your demographic information and survey responses will be deidentified
6. Your identity will only be known to the Principal Investigator

**STUDY RISKS:** Overall there are minimal risks to participating in this study. Although every reasonable effort has been taken, confidentiality during virtual activities cannot be guaranteed and it is possible that additional information beyond that collected for research purposes may be captured and used by other not associated with this study.

**STUDY BENEFITS:** This project will benefit the Office of PittServes and the University

Pittsburgh to better understand the needs of students of color and their civic needs. There are no direct benefits to you.

**PRIVACY (Person) and CONFIDENTIALITY (Data):** Demographic data, focus group and survey responses will be stored in a secure password protected online University of Pittsburgh drive. University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office and School of Education will have access to the research. Per University of Pittsburgh policy all research records must be maintained for at least 7 years following final reporting or publication of a project.

**WITHDRAWAL FROM STUDY PARTICIPATION:** You can, at any time withdraw from this research study. This means that you will also be withdrawn from further participation in this research study. Any identifiable research information obtained as part of this study prior to the date that you withdrew your consent will continue to be used and disclosed by the investigators for the purposes described above. It is possible that you may be removed from the research study by the researchers if, for example, you do not complete any of the research activities.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may want to discuss this study with your family and friends before agreeing to participate. If there are any words you do not understand, feel free to ask us. The investigators will be available to answer your current and future questions.

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:** The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions, voice

concerns or complaints about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions, concerns or complaints will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given.

## Appendix D: Student Demographic Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. All responses will be kept confidential, and your identity will remain private. Your responses to these questions are optional but will be helpful in reporting findings.

### PART I:

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth date:     \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_
2. Preferred alternative name (pick a name different from your own): \_\_\_\_\_
3. Preferred method of communication (check/complete all that apply):  
 Cell (text/call): \_\_\_\_\_      E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Instagram: \_\_\_\_\_      Facebook: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Twitter: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your sex or gender identity? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How do you identify racially/ethnically? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Mother's birthplace:  U.S.    Outside of U.S.   Father's birthplace:  U.S.    Outside of U.S.    Prefer not to answer
7. Language(s) spoken: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Are you the first in your family to go to college?  Yes  No  Prefer not to answer
9. Are you an international student?  Yes      No      Prefer not to answer

10. Are you an immigrant student?  Yes  No  Prefer not to answer

11. Are you eligible for Pell grants?  Yes  No  Prefer not to answer

12. Are you enrolled?  Full-time ( at least 12 credits)  Part-time (less than 12 credits)

13. Do you work?  Full-time  Part-time  Work Study

14. Current major: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Current Pitt Academic school/college (circle all that applies)

Arts & Sciences, Honors College, Nursing, Business, Computing & Information, Pharmacy, Public Health, Education, Engineering, Social Work, General Studies, Health & Rehabilitation Sciences)

16. Please list student organizations/co-curricular programs you are involved with:

\_\_\_\_\_

17. In order to verify validity, would you be willing to review preliminary results from this study?  Yes  No.

## Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Before conducting our focus group discussion, do I have your permission to audio/video record the focus group?

Yes  No

Each group will be asked to attempt to construct a group definition of civic mindedness utilizing the following prompted questions:

1. With your own understanding of civic engagement and considering your own civic journey, how have you taken action to make the world a better place?

2. When you think of a person who is very civically engaged what does that person do? How do they act? What do you think is their motivation?

## **Appendix F: Post Reflection Survey**

Given the definition of civic mindedness created by your designated focus group, review the definition of civic mindedness below:

“Civic-mindedness refers to a person’s inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community” ( Bringle & Steinberg, 2010, p. 429).

1. What does civic mindedness mean to you now? How does this meaning align with your definition from the focus group or from Bringle and Steinberg (2010)?
2. What future actions do you plan to take to continue your civic journey?



## Appendix G: Participant Demographics

**Table 3 Participant Demographics**

Social-economic information	Percentage
1st Generation	30%
Work Status- Part Time	90%
Pell Grant Eligible	50%
Both parents born outside of United States	60%
Both parent born in U.S	50%
One parent born outside of United States	0%
One parent born in the United States	0%

  

Academic school	Percentage
Arts & sciences	50%
Education	10%
Science	10%
General studies	20%
Engineering	10%
SHRS	10%

## Appendix H: PittServes Programs

**Table 4 PittServes Programs**

Program	Student audience	Partnership
FP Civic Engagement Course	First year students	School of Arts & Sciences
Civic Learning Distinction	All undergraduates	Office of the Provost
Civic Advising	All undergraduates	Civic Pathway working group
Student Civic Engagement Council	All undergraduates	Local nonprofit partners
PittVotes	All staff, faculty and students	Voting nonpartisan groups
	All undergraduates	Nonprofits in Hill District and Homewood
Civic Action Fellows		Nonprofits in East Liberty, Cumberland Trail, TN and United Planet/Ecuador
Alternative Breaks	All undergraduates	Various local nonprofit and community groups
Signature Days of Service	All School of Computing Science students	Various local nonprofit groups
IServes	All undergraduates- eligible for work study	Hill District public schools
America Reads	Only undergraduates that identify as Black and/or African American	Hill District after school program
Black Youth Connection	All undergraduates- eligible for work study	
Jumpstart	All undergraduates	Various Pre-K schools
GreenTeam	All students	Institutional partners
GreenFund		Institutional partners
Environmental Justice Collective	All undergraduates	N/A

**Appendix I: Some Undergraduate Student Organizations With Civic Engagement Focus  
(Advocacy and Service)**

**Table 5 Appendix I: Some Undergraduate Student Organizations With Civic Engagement Focus (Advocacy  
and Service)**

Organization	Civic engagement focus
Akshaya Patra Foundation	Service
Aldercare	Service
Alpha Phi Omega	Service
American Red Cross Club	Service
Animal Lovers Club	Service
#MISGO	Advocacy
ALCU Club at Pitt	Advocacy
Active Minds	Advocacy
Allegheny Science Policy and Governance	Advocacy
American Medical Women's Association	Advocacy
Amnesty International, Pitt Chapter	Advocacy
Autistic Students Union	Advocacy
Black Public Health Association	Advocacy
College Republicans	Advocacy
Bridge Pittsburgh	Advocacy
Challah for Hunger	Advocacy

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