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## Contemporary American Citizenship: A Genre Analysis and Phenomenological Investigation of Civic Education Centers

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CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP:  
A GENRE ANALYSIS AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION  
OF CIVIC EDUCATION CENTERS

by

Brandon Chase Goldsmith

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication

The University of Memphis

August, 2017

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## Abstract

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Contemporary American Citizenship: A Genre Analysis and Phenomenological  
Investigation of Civic Education Centers

American democracy demands deliberative debates rather than dictatorship, which require engaged individuals equipped with civic communication skills. The establishing of *united* states created a need to educate democratic citizens. This study investigates what it means to be an active American citizen and how citizenship is conceptualized and rhetorically practiced in the United States. In surveying civic education centers housed at universities that teach various ideals of democratic citizenship, I focus a close analysis on university-based associations from three national organizations: Western Kentucky University's Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility and ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships (America Democracy Project), Michigan State University's Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement (Campus Compact), and Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation (National Issues Forums Institute). I argue that the rhetoric of these centers constitutes a genre of human communication that expresses democratic voices. I employ a discourse genre analysis to find that the civic education center genre is characterized as (1) a rhetorical response to America's democratic problem of participation that (2) communicates the common purpose of teaching citizenship. I identify four shared themes that reveal the rhetorical view of the ideal citizen put forth by the centers. Next, I perform a phenomenological investigation in order to explore the space where the students' experiences and centers' discourses interconnect. Four common themes emerge from the student interviews: (1) giving back; (2) community engagement; (3) making a difference; and (4) gaining an awareness of

others. In examining their lived experiences, I discover expressions of how citizenship feels. Finally, I rhetorically analyze my phenomenological results to illuminate the centers' influences and their effectiveness. I find that the students appear to adopt the centers' language, and that the managers and staff view them as being successful.

Studying civic education centers as a genre exposes an important aspect of the rhetorical foundation of the American democratic system. I conclude that this civic education center discursive genre: (1) reveals democracy as a communication process, (2) exposes the affective aspects of citizenship, and (3) expands the sphere of democracy. Overall, my research contributes to the field by bringing to light significant connections between communication and citizenship.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*In a republican nation, whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion, and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance.*

Thomas Jefferson, April 20, 1824

Citizenship is a communication-based art form. As a musical performance, the actions of citizens become a society's rhythm. From single tone dictatorships to the symphony of parliaments, the form of government provides the scale. The United States' score plays out as a jazz groove in the key of democracy, which comes together from a mix of solo riffs and ensemble melodies where harmonies emerge from unresolved dissonant phrases and minor chords. While the opening verses have been sung, there are many future choruses to be played. Unfortunately, more and more people are laying out<sup>1</sup> of the line-up, causing America to change its tune. The art of democratic citizenship—as with any art form—is dependent on the training of new practitioners.

The establishment of the United States of America created a need to educate democratic citizens. Civic engagement and political participation are crucial components to the survival of a democracy. The United States' form of citizenship<sup>2</sup> comes with rights, responsibilities, and duties. In response to the colonies' revolutionary conversion from monarchal subjugation to national sovereignty, early American universities transformed into professional training schools, which developed literary and debate societies where individuals were taught to be ideal citizens (Aly & Tanquary, 1943; Bohman, 1943; Ferreira-Buckley, 1994; Guthrie, 1948; Longaker, 2007; Thomas, 1943). In this

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<sup>1</sup> "To temporarily cease playing while others continue" (Jazz Glossary, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Miller (1994) warns, "historians who have valorized public discourse have often failed to recognize that the public domain is a politically constituted space from which many groups have historically been excluded, and the ideal of the civic orator obviously served to justify the hegemony of a few good men" (pp. 275-6).

dissertation, I argue that those societies continue today in the form of civic education centers that promote democratic participation through community volunteerism, deliberative/dialogue forums, and political advocacy training.

What it means to be a United States American and who can be a citizen has been rhetorically defined and redefined over the course of our country's history. Our founding documents rhetorically constituted "We the People" into American citizens whose collective ideal was not rigid but could evolve across time and ideology.<sup>3</sup> The Declaration of Independence's revolutionary text discursively transformed the subjugated English colonists into a free and independent people. The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union united the states while maintaining each state's sovereignty, which resulted in individuals who were first and foremost citizens of their states. The ratification of the United States Constitution marked the beginning of a national people and the Bill of Rights protected the oratorical and compositional acts that fueled the country's independence and influenced the nation's form of democracy. In a democratic society that values persuasive decision making, becoming an ideal citizen is a continuous process of public and private negotiation. America's democracy, which demands that decisions be made through deliberative debates rather than dictatorship, requires engaged citizens who have civic communication skills.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the 13<sup>th</sup> (1865), 14<sup>th</sup> (1868) and 15<sup>th</sup> (1870) Amendments extended citizenship and voting rights to African Americans, while the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment declared "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex" (1919). Who is allowed to participate as a citizen has been and continues to be discursively and legally contested.

An important question I explore in my pilot study<sup>4</sup> is, “What are the contemporary conceptions and practices of the ideal American citizen?” One way to identify citizenship ideals is to investigate the sites where citizenship is taught. I investigate what it means to be an ideal United States citizen and how citizenship is currently conceptualized and rhetorically practiced in America’s form of democracy by analyzing civic education centers housed at universities. From the country’s founding until now, academic, government, and community organizations have been developed to deal with the democratic problem of participation. The problem is defined through active citizenship. For a democracy to function, it needs people to participate in its democratic processes. I argue that what those processes are and what counts as legitimate participation are rhetorically constructed and discursively defined by the associations and organizations that teach citizenship.

In this chapter, I am going to first briefly explain the democratic problem of participation and its possible consequences. Then, I describe the civic education centers, which are my objects of study. Next, I detail and outline my rationale, research methods, and research questions. Finally, I identify and qualitatively bracket my biases, beliefs and interests.

### **The Democratic Problem of Participation**

People born in the United States of America are taught that they live in a constitutional democratic republic. Democracy is understood to be a “government by the people; esp. a system of government in which all the people of a state or polity (or, esp.

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<sup>4</sup> My inquiry is a small-scale test of the existence of a new genre and of the feasibility of a mixed methods approach (Phenomenological & Rhetorical analysis) to evaluate the efficacy of organizational mission, vision, and purpose statements, which if successful could be upgraded to a full-scale study with a bigger sample size.

formerly, a subset of them meeting particular conditions) are involved in making decisions about its affairs, typically by voting to elect representatives” (Democracy, n.d.). School children learn The Preamble to the United States Constitution (1789), which starts with “We the People” and President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (1863) “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” American democracy depends on citizen involvement. Political philosopher, John Rawls (1993/2005) asserts, “the safety of democratic liberties requires the active participation of citizens” (p. 205). The participation of the people is taught to be a crucial component to the function of the United States system of government. However, the actualities of the American experience are that few individuals are civically engaged in their communities or politically involved in democratic processes. The United States’ problem of participation is a people problem—a democracy needs engaged citizens who are involved civically and politically.

The problem of participation has historically plagued democracies. French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1834) foresaw the participatory challenges America’s democratic system would face in terms of citizen-based civic engagement. He warned,

There is, indeed, a most dangerous passage in the history of a democratic people. When the taste for physical gratifications amongst such a people has grown more rapidly than their education and their experience of free institutions, the time will come when men are carried away, and lose all self-restraint, at the sight of the new possessions they are about to lay hold upon. In their interests and exclusive anxiety to make a fortune they lose sight of the close connection which exists

between the private fortune of each of them and the prosperity of all. It is not necessary to do violence to such a people in order to strip them of the rights they enjoy; they themselves willingly loosen their hold. The discharge of political duties appears to them to be a troublesome annoyance, which diverts them from their occupations and business. If they be required to elect representatives, to support the Government by personal service, to meet on public business, they have no time—they cannot waste their precious time in useless engagements: such idle amusements are unsuited to serious men who are engaged with the more important interests of life....and the better to look after what they call their business, they neglect their chief business, which is to remain their own masters.

(p. 663)

Tocqueville describes how declines in individual involvement can damage democratic societies, and business interests can transform citizen engagement from a necessity into a waste of time. He explains that people have to learn about and be reminded of the importance of civic and political participation.

Voter apathy, a lack of civic education, and decreases in citizen involvement, along with increases in corporate and elite interests have been linked to the deterioration of American democracy. In *Bowling Alone*, sociologist Robert Putnam documents an overall decline in political participation and civic engagement in America. According to Putnam (2002), there was a measurable loss of individual involvement in all levels of the United States system of government. “Over the last two decades the number of office seekers...from school board to town council—shrank by perhaps 15 percent....Americans lost more than a quarter million candidates annually to choose among” (p. 42). Putnam

(2002) connects those losses to decreasing levels of participation in community clubs, political parties, local organizations, school affairs, political rallies, letters to the editor, and people giving speeches. Putnam labels the cumulative effect of these and other activities “social capital,” which he uses to measure the health of America’s democracy. Social capital levels reflect the extent of political involvement and civic engagement among Americans. Putnam’s extensive study reveals a democracy in decline. “Those activities that brought citizens together, those activities that most clearly embody social capital—that have declined most rapidly” (p. 45).

In examining Putnam’s social capital, political scientist Henry Milner (2002) points out that participation across organizations cannot be considered as equal. Milner (2002) contends that the most suitable gauge of participation is voter turnout. An examination of recent elections demonstrates another area of decline. The 2014 election recorded one of the lowest turnout rates in decades. According to the United States Election Project, only 36.2% of eligible voters participated in the 2014 midterm election. These numbers reflect a significant drop from 2012’s 58.6% and 2010s 41.8% (Voter Turnout Data, 2015). Effectively 18% of America’s eligible voters (approx. 41 million) decided who would represent the entire country of 319 million people (United States Census Bureau, n.d.) from Congress to state representatives to school board members. While voting is not the only form of civic engagement, it is a leading indicator and the recent results are troubling.

America’s problem of participation is defined by declines in citizen involvement in political and civic activities. For a democracy to survive, it needs to solve the problem of participation. According to communication professor Jill McMillan and political

scientist Kathy Harriger (2002), “the decline in political participation in American democracy is cause for concern among scholars and practitioners of politics because of the fundamental assumption that democracy depends upon at least some measure of popular participation” (p. 237). If individual involvement is a necessary ingredient of the United States system of democracy, then what happens if the people do not participate?

### **Possible Consequences**

Professor of communication studies John Deethardt (1983) predicts that if America’s participatory problems are not solved “a course will be set for more totalitarian forms of governance” (p. 163). Putnam concluded that vast numbers of citizens were neglecting their civic duties and dropping out of the governing process. Corporations and interests groups can fill the political voids caused by a lack of citizen engagement. Director of Penn State’s Center for Public Speaking and Civic Engagement, Rosa Eberly (2002) found that economic elite and corporate interests override citizen preferences because “business groups are far more numerous and active; they spend much more money; and they tend to get their way” (p. 575). Business lobbyists help write and influence the laws that govern their industries and people’s lives.

Corporations appear to be more politically active than citizens and the United States system of government is reflecting the consequences of that reality. President Barack Obama argued that our election system favors business interests. Obama connects this inequity to the *Citizens United* court case, which ruled the bans on corporate money in federal elections unconstitutional (The White House, Jan. 21, 2015). On the ruling’s anniversary, President Obama stated, “five years ago, a Supreme Court ruling allowed big companies—including foreign corporations—to spend unlimited amounts of money to

influence our elections. *The Citizens United* decision was wrong, and it has caused real harm to our democracy” (The White House, Jan. 21, 2015).<sup>5</sup> The rise of business interests over individual political concerns could irrevocably damage American democracy.

The United States governing system appears to be on the path to becoming an oligarchy, a government ruled by a wealthy elite. Political scientists Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page’s (2014) comprehensive study<sup>6</sup> found that a minority of wealthy individuals and corporations controlled most of America’s policy decisions. Based on their findings, Gilens and Page (2014) surmised “that if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America’s claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened” (p. 578). They found that businesses and affluent individuals have more political influence than the American people: “In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule” (p. 576). Declines in citizen involvement create the conditions for increases in political power for corporate interests and wealthy elites. Gerald Hauser (2004) describes how the democratic problem of participation can lead to an oligarchy. “Without rhetorical competence, citizens are disabled in the public arenas of citizen exchange—the marketplace, the representative assembly, the court, and public institutions—and

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<sup>5</sup> The Supreme Court ruled that corporations and labor unions have the First Amendment right to make independent expenditures that advocate election or defeat of candidates in certain federal elections and thus Section 203 of BCRA, which bans “electioneering communications” made during critical preelection period, is unconstitutional, despite contention that concerns over distortion, corruption or appearance of corruption, and rights of dissenting shareholders justify such restrictions, since, among other things, identity of source is not part of free-speech analysis, Congress may not equalize relative ability of individuals and groups to influence elections, and funding at dispute does not—unlike “soft money” donations—give rise to harms that section allegedly seeks to prevent (SCOTUSblog, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Gilens and a small army of research assistants gathered data on a large, diverse set of policy cases: 1,779 instances between 1981 and 2002 in which a national survey of the general public asked a favor/oppose question about a proposed policy change....These 1,779 cases do not constitute a sample from the universe of all possible policy alternatives (this is hardly conceivable), but we see them as particularly relevant to assessing the public’s influence on policy” (Gilens & Page, 2014, p. 568).

democracy turns into a ruse disguising the reality of oligarchic power” (p. 52). Citizen involvement in political and civic issues acts as a counterbalance to corporate influence.

The democratic problem of participation, therefore, is created by America’s need for citizens who are actively engaged in the political process. Tocqueville (1834/2004) predicted the United States would encounter participatory issues, but he also revealed a solution, voluntary associations, which he believed were at the heart of America’s success as a democracy: “Nothing, in my opinion is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America” (p. 632). Tocqueville (1834/2004) observed these organizations and groups classifying their social function as being schools of democracy that taught people through the performance of civic duties how to act as “responsible citizens.” I argue that university-based civic education centers are the contemporary enactments of Tocqueville’s schools of democracy<sup>7</sup> and represent higher education’s response to the democratic problem of participation.

### **Civic Education Centers**

Civic education centers are defined through the types of civic involvement and political participation they communicatively promote in order to accomplish their rhetorical missions. According to McMillan and Harriger (2002), a civic education movement<sup>8</sup> has spread across academic campuses in reaction to declines in citizen involvement. “Higher education professionals have begun to ask what colleges and universities can do to reverse these troubling trends” (p. 240). In my pilot study, I examine how active participation is taught and actually practiced. What are the

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter 3 outlines the scholarly connections between Tocqueville’s associations and contemporary centers.

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 3 documents the contemporary civic engagement movement from 1980 to the present.

educational responses to our current problems of participation? My investigation follows this line of inquiry by concentrating on centers based at universities that teach people how to civically engage each other and/or the government. My inquiry highlights three modes of execution (Deliberation/Dialogue Forums, Volunteerism/Civic Learning, and Advocacy Training) that represent different approaches to solving the democratic problem of participation. I describe each approach and an example of a corresponding national organization. The observed organizations are the National Issues Forums Institute, Campus Compact, and America Democracy Project.

### **Deliberative/Dialogue Centers**

Deliberative/dialogue centers provide forums and spaces for people to engage national, state, and local issues and controversies. They approach America's democratic problem of participation through teaching various communication practices. The center's communicative purpose, to promote civic education, is accomplished through the facilitation of community conversations (city and school board issues) and political discussions (national, state, and regional controversies).

The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) is a "network of civic, educational, and other organizations, and individuals, whose common interest is to promote public deliberation in America" (National Issues Forums, 2014). The forums provide participants with the full range of choices surrounding current controversies through booklets produced by the Kettering Foundation. "The goal of NIF (and of democracy itself) is a political community which seeks wide participation among its members in articulating the public will on issues that come before it" (Osborn & Osborn, 1991, p. 9). Scott London (2010), in a Kettering report on NIFI organizations, states, "today, there are

more than 50 of these centers operating in almost every state in the union, most affiliated with institutions of higher education” (p. 3). According to Martin Carcasson (2008), 41 of the NIFI centers are connected to universities and/or community colleges; however, only two were housed in Communication Departments. Carcasson is currently managing the Center for Public Deliberation,<sup>9</sup> which he started in 2006 as a part of the Communication Department at Colorado State University. Carcasson (2008) argues that communication faculty “who can make deliberative work the centerpiece of their teaching, research, and service” would be “well suited” for running these centers (p. 38).

### **Civic Learning/Volunteer Centers**

Civic learning/volunteer centers focus on community-level and individual-level involvement. They set about solving the democratic problem of participation through local volunteerism and social responsibility. Civic education is promoted by means of community engagement and/or service learning projects.

Campus Compact is “a national coalition of nearly 1,100 colleges and universities” that encourages “campuses to develop students’ citizenship skills and forge effective community partnerships” (Who We Are, 2016). Their democratic vision is to train engaged citizens through service learning programs. A university’s or college’s president joins Campus Compact by signing the *Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education*. “Presidents are encouraged to set the tone on their campus for public and community service and to support this work by their investment in infrastructure as well as from the bully pulpit” (Gearan, 2005, p. 35). Seventy-five university presidents spoke at the 1985 launch and within 10 years they had over 500 members (Campus Compact, 1995). Their membership continues to grow. “Students at

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<sup>9</sup> The center is one of my objects of study and it further described in Chapter 4.

Campus Compact's 1,000+ member colleges and universities contributed an estimated \$7.1 billion in service to their communities during the 2005–2006 academic year" (Campus Compact, 2007, p. 2). According to Campus Compact (2013), "nearly all members—96%—have at least one center devoted to community and civic engagement, and more than 60% have more than one center" (p. 7).

### **Advocacy Training Centers**

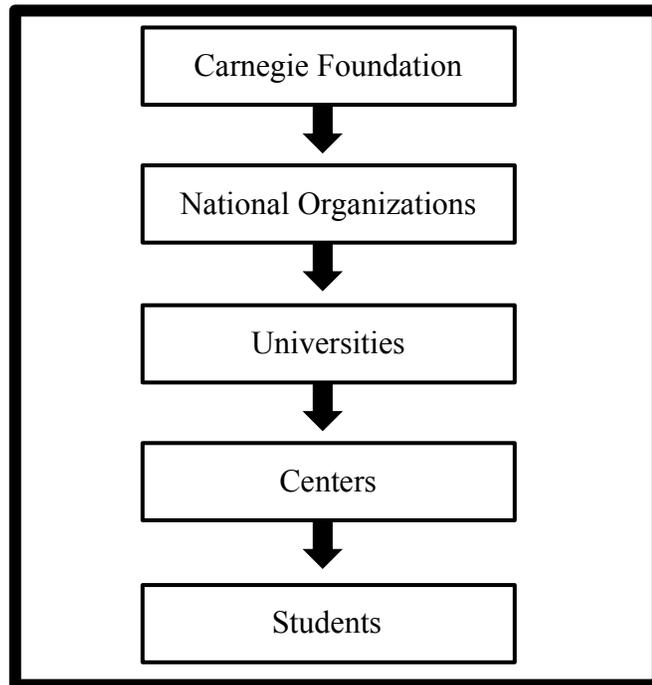
Advocacy training centers concentrate on citizen involvement in government policy and decision-making. These organizations deal with the democratic problem of participation by way of training programs that teach political skills and provide experience-based courses on governmental practices and procedures. Civic education is communicatively promoted through the concepts of active involvement in community politics and individual contributions to policy decisions. For example, students learn "the roles and actions of government agencies, advocacy organizations, and citizens in trying to address problems and resolve conflicts" (Civic Engagement in Action Series, n.d.).

Initiated in 2003 as a partnership between the American Association of State Colleges and *The New York Times*, "the American Democracy Project (ADP) is a multi-campus initiative focused on higher education's role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens for our democracy." The goal is to create committed citizens who are actively involved in their communities. "Far too often, civic engagement in college means volunteering or some form of service learning...Beyond understanding, however, students also need to develop skills to engage in the world of politics and public policy." ADP aims to help students develop political skills (i.e., civic knowledge, written

and oral communication, problem solving) that will benefit them beyond graduation (American Democracy Project, n.d.).

### **Overview**

The National Issues Forums Institute, Campus Compact, and America Democracy Project have educational components that focus on teaching, preparing, educating, and producing civically minded student citizens. Below the national organizations in the hierarchal framework are the universities, the individual civic education centers, and, finally, the student programs and/or clubs where their mission and vision statements are realized (See Figure 1). I outlined above three modes of execution (Deliberation/Dialogue Forums, Volunteerism/Civic Learning and Advocacy Training) through which the centers are discursively actualized.



*Figure 1. Hierarchal Chain*

For this investigation I catalogue the centers that are housed on higher-education institutions from the national organizations' websites, which have lists of connected associations and centers. I examine one university-based association from each of the three national organizations, with one being associated with a communication department for a total of 3 centers: Western Kentucky University's (WKU) Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility and ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships (America Democracy Project), Michigan State University's (MSU) Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement (Campus Compact), and Colorado State University's (CSU) Center for Public Deliberation (National Issues Forums Institute).

The centers were chosen based on their focus on teaching citizenship, community engagement, and civic education.<sup>10</sup> WKU's Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility and ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships want their students to "learn about and practice the virtues of citizenship" (Our Mission and History, 2016). They provide opportunities for their students to "engage in successful applied-learning opportunities and work together to improve quality of life by acting as public problem-solvers and effective community-builders" (ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships, 2014). MSU's Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement aims "to provide engaged, issues and service-focused, community-based, mutually beneficial, and integrated learning opportunities, building and enhancing commitment to academics, personal and professional development, and civic responsibility" (Mission Statement, n.d.). One of the three mission goals of CSU's Center for Public Deliberation is to "improve Civic Pedagogy: Study and improve methods of developing citizenship skills at all levels (K-12, higher education, citizen education); Incorporate deliberative pedagogy

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<sup>10</sup> The full details of the selection process are documented in the Research Design chapter.

at all levels” (About Us, 2017). I argue that these centers represent educational solutions to the democratic problem of participation.

My pilot study follows a hierarchal discourse chain (mission, vision, and purpose statements) from the Carnegie Engagement Classification<sup>11</sup> through the national organizations (Campus Compact, National Issues Forums, and American Democracy Project) to the Universities (MSU, CSU, and WKU) and their centers, and finally student interviews (See Figure 1). A phenomenological inquiry along with a rhetorical analysis tests whether the civic education experiences promoted by organizations and university-based centers are filtered down to the discourse of the students. Essentially, this investigation is an assessment of the communicative efficacy of this civic education system.

### **Rationale**

My objective is to broaden the research beyond individualized self-studies and unrelated case studies to develop recommendations for current and/or future centers and to better understand democratic citizenship. Only in the last few years have organizations been created that attempt to bring the various types and forms of centers together. According to Nancy Thomas (Director of The Democracy Imperative) and Martin Carcasson (2010), professor of communication, many of the contemporary centers are relatively new and “in many cases, they didn’t know about each other or even the networks of individuals doing similar work.” One solution to this issue was the formation of The Democracy Imperative (p. 3). In 2007, “after four days of dialogue and planning, we created The Democracy Imperative, a national network of scholars, campus leaders,

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<sup>11</sup> The centers I am studying must be attached to universities that have received this classification. The Carnegie Engagement Classification is detailed in the Methods chapter.

and civic leaders committed to strengthening democracy” (The Democracy Imperative, 2012). A consequence of this lack of awareness has led to the research on the organizations being inconsistent and individualized.

Scholars such as Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen (2004) have analyzed civic education centers as singular case studies, examining their effects on individual groups and/or specific communities. Carcasson (2008) surveyed the institutional histories of a sample of Kettering Foundation and Nation Issues Forum Institute sponsored centers to explore the operational challenges, lessons learned, and future development of higher education-based deliberative centers. According to Carcasson (2008), several research reports have been written about individual centers, but they have been focused on the needs of specific national organizations and/or foundations. Those funding or providing resources to centers have evaluated their specific projects. In an attempt to counter the effects of self-study and unconnected case studies, I examine the civic education centers as a cohesive whole.

By widening the narrow findings from unrelated singular cases, my aim is to develop general guidelines that might add to the discussion concerning the future direction of civic education centers. Mathews (2010) wonders, “What centers may eventually become is an open question” (p. 5). For London (2010), “The big question facing the centers is whether the value of their work is adequately recognized and whether they will continue to get the support they need in coming years” (p. 14). My goal is to expand the scholarly conversation by developing communication recommendations for current and/or future centers and to understand the influence of the national

organizations, which centers are deemed ‘successful,’ and who or what determines that success.

Finally, investigating civic education centers in relation to each other could paint a comprehensive picture of the contemporary ideals of citizenship. Debi Witte (2010), co-editor of *Higher Education Exchange*, contends the centers are important because they “make us aware that democracy requires the ecosystem of civic alliances, social norms, and deliberative practices” (p. 74). The study of civic education centers is a study of how citizenship ideals are constructed and taught. The centers provide a vehicle from which to explore America’s democratic problem of participation and could contribute to the scholarship concerning United States democracy. My pilot study is directed by the following research questions.

RQ1: Do the centers’ rhetoric(s)<sup>12</sup> represent a discourse genre?

RQ1a: What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers’ discourses?

RQ2: Do the centers rhetorically constitute<sup>13</sup> active citizens through their discourse?

RQ2a: What is the identity of the ‘ideal’ citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers?

RQ2b: What is the essence of contemporary citizenship that is experienced by those who use the centers?

RQ3: Are the centers’ outcomes matching their rhetorical missions?

RQ3a: Are the students adopting their respective center’s language?

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<sup>12</sup> “Today rhetoric is most generally understood as using symbols to induce and coordinate social action” (Hauser, 2002, p. 32).

<sup>13</sup> “Narratives ‘make real’ coherent subjects. They constitute subjects as they present a particular textual position” (Charland, 1987, p. 138).

## **Research Methods**

I perform a generic description and a phenomenological investigation with a rhetorical analysis to examine my research questions. The genre analysis reveals whether or not the civic education centers are addressing the democratic problem of participation, and if so, how. The interpretative phenomenological exploration of the students paints a picture of how individuals actually experience the centers. I rhetorically analyze the phenomenological results to test the effectiveness of the centers' discourse on the students.

### **Generic Description**

I perform what Sonja Foss (2009) classifies as a “generic description,” which aims to theoretically define and formulate a genre. Foss outlines the analysis process in “four steps: (1) observing similarities in rhetorical response to particular situations; (2) collecting artifacts that occur in similar situations; (3) analyzing the artifacts to discover if they share characteristics; and (4) formulating the organizing principle of the genre.” Foss recommends seeking out similar rhetorical responses and common situational constraints. These aspects combine to form the primary elements of a genre. A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that across instances has a common communicative purpose.

First, in attempting to establish the existence of a civic education center genre, I assess if the national organizations (National Issues Forums Institute, Campus Compact & America Democracy Project) were created in response to a recurring situation. Second, I look for the existence of a common communicative purposes within the “institutional context” (Bhatia, 2004, p. 164): mission statements, press releases and other public

pronouncements, instructional/education program descriptions, published works, online presence, and academic research on these centers. Third, I visit the actual locations to collect promotional materials, conduct interviews with the students in the programs, and give the managers and staff questionnaires.

A primary component of a genre is that it reacts to its historical context. “As the intellectual content of a field changes over time, so must the forms used to discuss it; this is why genre knowledge involves both form and content” (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 25). A genre is not static, but changes its form and content, based on the community knowledge and public practices of different periods. In conceptualizing civic education centers as a discursive genre, I test whether they respond to the same recurring situation and promote similar communication purposes over time. To accomplish this task, I examine the origins of the national organizations that sponsor and fund the contemporary centers.

The final test examines the structural form a genre takes. A discourse genre’s practices and formats are produced and reproduced by the context of its constraining conventions—the genre’s rules. These rules represent a shared reaction to the recurring situation that the organizations were formed to solve and/or fix. For example, if America’s democratic problem of participation is viewed as a recurring situation, then the common conventions (the rules) created by the centers to solve participatory problems could be studied as their shared reaction. By comparing mission, purpose, and vision statement themes across the various centers, I investigate whether or not there are consistent content structures within the organizations.

After performing these genre tests, the inquiry turns from conceptualization to the formulation of a theoretical description. Once a discourse genre is established, it provides a platform for studying how the knowledge generated is transmitted and which mediums (i.e., oral and/or written) are the more effective means of communication (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Identifying civic education centers as a discourse genre could help determine an ideal framework from which to teach and/or communicate United States democracy and American citizenship.

### **Interpretive Phenomenology**

A phenomenological examination of the centers' participants presents another means to better understand democratic citizenship and how it is experienced.

Phenomenology “aims to understand and interpret participant’s experiences to determine the meaning of experience” (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixmith, 2013, p. 20).

Tuohy et al. (2013) refer to interpretive phenomenology as a hermeneutical exploration of people’s realities that attempts to understand society from the individual level.

Frederick Wertz (2005), a phenomenological psychologist, describes the process as returning to the “phenomena as they are lived” (p. 168).

I explore citizenship as a phenomenon that is individually and collectively experienced at the civic education centers. I focus “on describing what all participants have in common” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The purpose is to understand their “common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). My goal is to seek out the essence of American citizenship, which means that this study uncovers whether or not “all the [individual] experiences have an underlying structure” (Creswell,

2013, p. 82). I collect interviews, observations, and texts as data and dissect them to discover significant statements and/or to uncover meaningful clusters of themes. The objective of a phenomenological investigation is to describe the essence of a particular subject as experienced by a group of people.

Researchers examine and discuss democracy and citizenship theoretically and through the lens of scholarly literature, but how are these ideas actually experienced by individuals? According to Wertz (2005), phenomenology humanizes concepts by introducing people's perceptions into the equation. The rhetoric of American citizenship might not represent the reality of the people's experiences of it. My investigation takes a step beyond the discourse analysis of the centers' mission, purpose, and vision statements (i.e., genre analysis) in order to gain a glimpse into what it means to live as an active democratic citizen. A phenomenological analysis of the centers and the people who use them provides a societal snapshot of United States democracy in action.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

In addition to my phenomenological investigation, I examine the rhetorical influence that the civic education centers had on the students. I compare the centers' and students' discourses to discover whom the centers ask the students to be. According to Edwin Black (1970), "in all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something but to be something" (p. 95). The centers' managers and staff will be given questionnaires asking about their observations and opinions about the respective centers in which they work. I interview the students in order to uncover their lived experiences at the centers. I explore the rhetorical horizon where the experiences of the students' and centers' discourses come together.

## Qualitative Bracketing

A qualitative component of a phenomenological study is the “bracketing” of the researcher into the findings. Spiegelberg (1965) describes qualitative bracketing as a suspension of judgment. The inquirer examines his/her personal biases. “Before collecting data the researchers contemplated and acknowledged their preconceived ideas” (Tuohy et al., 2013, p. 19). The researcher seeks to understand his/her past knowledge of the phenomenon and record the new experiences he/she has during the investigation (Creswell, 2013). Groenewald (2004) contends that phenomenology reveals the paradigms and worldviews that influence both the participants and researchers. In order to identify and bracket my views and past understandings, I examine a long term performance project, *BCG’s<sup>14</sup> School of Democracy*, my academic teaching methods, and personal political experiences that have influenced my biases, beliefs, and interests concerning American citizenship and the democratic problem of participation.

### Biases, Beliefs, and Interests

I have been working on versions of *BCG’s School of Democracy* since 2005.<sup>15</sup> It has been a major aspect of my academic career. The performance piece was originally created as an undergraduate senior capstone project titled *The United Church of America* (UCA). The UCA is a performance, a form of political theatre that develops its rituals from the familiar American forms of Protestant, Catholic, and Southern Baptist faiths, as well as from Tele-evangelism. The show unfolds as something akin to a religious service with several familiar roles. For example, a Choir Director leads the audience as an

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<sup>14</sup> BCG are my initials, Brandon Chase Goldsmith.

<sup>15</sup> “Evaluating the United Church of America.” National Communication Association Conference, San Antonio, TX, 2006.

assembled congregation in patriotic songs, whereas a Liturgist performs audience-based call and response recitations, including repeating the Preamble of the Constitution and reciting the original Pledge of Allegiance. The Constitutional Prophet, in turn, performs expository and topical sermons from the *Political Scriptures* (i.e., a set of historical documents I edited into chapter and verse including the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the letters and essays of James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine). The UCA addresses the democratic problem of participation through selected writings of America's founders and the country's founding documents. UCA shows have been performed in coffee houses, art galleries, theaters, festivals, and at the 2007 National Communication Association Conference.<sup>16</sup>

Continuing the project, my Master's research transformed the show's structure by combining the worlds of communication and theater. Research into small group and deliberative communication resulted in the addition of a town hall style discussion at the end of the performance. The audience members were asked to communicatively engage each other. During my doctoral studies, I continued to perform the shows and tested the script's affect on audiences.<sup>17</sup> The performance has been a primary vehicle for my research into America's form of democracy and ideal constructions of United States citizenship.<sup>18</sup> The lessons I learned were translated into my academic pursuits as a graduate teaching assistant. I worked with a fellow graduate colleague, Marcus Hassel, to

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<sup>16</sup> "United Church of America: Be an Olympian of Liberty!" National Communication Association Conference, Chicago, IL, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> "A Nation of Prodigal Sons: Fantasies, Personae, and Standpoints in A New Form of Political Theater: The United Church of America" (Panel Co-Chair) National Communication Association Conference, Orlando, FL, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> "Citizen as Parent: Reconstituting America's metaphorical family" National Communication Association Conference, Orlando, FL, 2012.

focus our public speaking classes on civic communication with the goal of transforming the classroom into a public space where citizenship skills can be learned and practiced.<sup>19</sup> Our students' speech topics were focused on national, state, local, and university-based Constitutional controversies. Civic education became a primary component of my political performances and teaching philosophy.

The individual involvement and civic education concepts I teach and expand upon in the shows are informed by the following personal experiences. As an advocate for the freedoms of speech and the press, I regularly publish letters to the editor and Op-eds concerning political and social issues connecting my academic research to current events. As a campaign consultant, I continue to help a local mayor write his state of the city addresses. I have also designed messaging for a candidate running for county mayor and was the head speechwriter, debate coach, and lead surrogate for a candidate running for Arkansas' Lieutenant Governor. These political experiences not only inspire my academic research/teaching and political performances, but also shape my ideas of what makes an ideal citizen.

Having identified my biases, beliefs, and interests concerning civic education, public deliberation and citizenship, the study needs to start from a clean slate and let the research results rest on the findings. My experiences of citizenship are not the experiences of the students. Deliberation may not be an effective means of teaching political engagement or community involvement. The civic education model might not be a successful solution to the democratic problem of political participation. I am studying civic education centers because I truly care about what they are teaching but to be an

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<sup>19</sup> "Engaging Civic Communication: Public Speaking and Constitutional Controversies" (Co-Author Marcus Hassel) Southern States Communication Association, Louisville, KY, 2013.

effective researcher I have to identify my biases and beliefs and suspend those judgments for the integrity of this inquiry.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

My pilot study explores what it means to be an ideal United States citizen and how citizenship is conceptualized and rhetorically practiced in America's form of democracy. I examine this by analyzing civic education centers that promote democratic participation through community volunteerism, deliberative/dialogue forums, and political advocacy training. As shown in this introductory chapter, the study assumes: a) democracy depends on individual involvement; b) there is a problem of political participation that is negatively affecting the United States' system of democracy; and c) the centers represent higher education's response to the problem. I argue the centers provide a vehicle from which to explore rhetorically America's democratic problem of political participation and contribute to the scholarship concerning United States citizenship. By investigating how individuals are taught to be ideal citizens we could gain a better understanding of how American democracy is experienced and actually lived.

Chapter 2, the literature review, is divided into two parts. The first section explores the communication scholarship connected to deliberative democracy, citizenship, civic education, the public sphere, and non-profit organizations. My study's conceptualization of civic education centers as a genre of human discourse bring these five areas of communication together in a conversation. The second major section examines the modern conceptions of the democratic problem of participation and the contemporary civic education centers. My scholarly review reveals the cultural context and theoretical conversations communication scholars were having during their

development. I separate the investigation into three time periods: 1980s, 1990s, and 2000 – 2013.

Chapter 3 details the study's research questions and the approaches (genre description, interpretive phenomenology, and rhetorical analysis) I apply to answer them. The research design defines the specific requirements of the three discourse tests (historical, situation and purpose, and structural) that I use to assess the conceptualization of the civic education centers as a genre of human discourse. I describe interpretive phenomenology, which I employ to examine the experiences of the students, and the rhetorical analysis of those results. Finally, I outline the criteria for selection of the centers and participants who will be investigated and interviewed.

Chapter 4 examines civic education centers as a discourse genre. I utilize the mission, vision, and purpose statements of the Carnegie Foundation, the national organizations (National Issues Forums, The American Democracy Project, Campus Compact), the universities (Colorado State University, Western Kentucky University, Michigan State University) and their civic education centers along with the questionnaire answers of centers' managers and staff (primary participants) in my analysis. A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that, across instances, has a common communicative purpose. I find that civic education centers do constitute a discourse genre based on their successful passing of the historical, situation and purpose, and structural test conditions. Based on my findings, I characterize the civic education center genre as (1) a rhetorical response to America's democratic problem of participation that (2) communicates the common purpose of teaching citizenship. Across the centers' discourses, I identify four shared themes: (a) civic education, (b) citizenship,

(c) active citizen, and (d) community. These primary elements reveal the rhetorical view of American citizenship put forth by the civic education centers. The managers' and staff's responses paint a picture of a civically engaged, informed, responsible, educated, problem-solver, citizen-leader who participates in a version of community with the goal of improving the society and the world around them. I discover that the genre provides a rhetorical space where various concepts of the ideal citizen can be constructed and contested.

Chapter 5 performs an interpretive phenomenological inquiry aimed at bringing the lived experiences of the secondary participants (student volunteers) to the surface through a series of interview questions. The primary participants (managers and staff) are given questionnaires asking about their observations and opinions about the respective centers in which they work. I rhetorically compare the students' interview responses to the civic education organizations' mission, vision, and purpose statements and the managers' and staffs' questionnaire answers. When asking the secondary participants what aspects of citizenship they learned from the centers, I find four common themes across the student interview responses: (1) giving back; (2) community engagement; (3) making a difference; and (4) gaining an awareness of others. When describing their lived experiences, the students appear to adopt the language of the centers and reflect the national organizations' rhetoric: National Issues Forums Institute (Deliberation), Campus Compact (Volunteerism/Service Learning), and American Democracy Project (Advocacy). An examination of the primary participant questionnaire responses shows that the managers and staff view the civic education centers as successfully achieving their missions, purposes, and visions.

Lastly, in Chapter 6, I discuss my recommendations and implications of my pilot study, which I hope will benefit and inform current and/or future civic education centers. After reviewing my findings, I describe three areas that could contribute to the centers' furthered success. The centers should: (1) combine their approaches; (2) address community issues; and (3) encourage an awareness of others. In analyzing the implications of my finding, I argue that the civic education center genre (1) reveals democracy as a communication process, (2) exposes the affective aspects of citizenship, and (3) expands the sphere of democracy.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

My central argumentative claim is that civic education centers that teach the ideals of citizenship represent a genre of human discourse. My study's conceptualization converges five areas of communication scholarship (deliberative democracy, citizenship, civic education, the public sphere, and nonprofit organizations) into a single conversation. In this chapter, I discuss the relevant scholarly research and findings. The literature review is divided into two parts.

Part one of the literature review begins with a rhetorical examination of America's system of government that looks at the country as a *deliberative democracy*. This governing construct requires a communicative version of *citizenship* that promotes community and political involvement through discourse amongst the people. To obtain the best results, citizens must be civically educated in the various concepts and practices of democratic engagement. The *civic education* process actualizes the *public sphere*, wherein individuals and their various ideas are physically brought together. The first part of the review ends by focusing on the communication issues of *nonprofit organizations*, such as the university-based civic education centers investigated in this inquiry face.

The second part examines the modern conceptions of the democratic problem of participation and the contemporary civic education centers from 1980 to 2013. The literature review explores the cultural context and theoretical conversations communication scholars were having during their development. The investigation is divided into three time periods: 1980s, 1990s, and 2000-2013.

## **Deliberative Democracy**

Communication scholars view deliberation as a fundamental feature of a functioning democracy. Aune (2008) claims that popular deliberation is a powerful component to “any quest for democratization, in the United States” (p. 488). The process provides an approach for individuals and/or their representatives to solve a range of issues. A democracy requires individual involvement and deliberation provides a communicative path to political participation. Hauser and Benoit-Barne (2002) assert democratic participation is deliberative. Deliberation is a rhetorical response to the democratic problem of participation. Tonn (2005) maintains, “public argument and deliberative processes are the ‘heart’ of true democracy” (p. 424). Welsh (2002) defines deliberation as a means for citizens, groups, and their representatives to work through differences. Ivie (2008) points out that deliberation is ideal for democratic republics that disdain secrecy and encourage openly speaking in public. Mattson (2002) insists “Americans have in the past and continue today to deliberate, as I expect they will for some time now” (p. 327)—suggesting that deliberation is built into the fabric of United States citizenship.

Carcasson and Sprain (2012) paint deliberation as a citizen centered model. “Deliberative politics relies [*sic*] on citizens, not just experts or politicians, to be deeply involved in public decision making” (p. 20). Deliberation, a public decision-making process, and democracy, which by definition requires citizen input, complement each other. McMillan and Harriger (2002) promote John Rawl’s vision of democracy where “citizenship demands deliberation” (p. 241). Welsh (2002) describes deliberation’s role as being that of legitimacy: “Any action emerging from deliberation should undoubtedly

be considered more democratic as more citizens are able to speak on an issue” (p. 684) because decisions are legitimized through discourse.<sup>1</sup> Goodnight (2012) views the democratic role of citizens as being a rhetorical situation, where they create social knowledge and resolve problems through deliberative argumentation.

Communities need a public method through which to communicate their beliefs and values amongst each other. Public deliberation helps groups develop strategic plans and collective visions of life that can be put into action (Hicks, 2002). Hicks claims most people experience and are taught deliberative participation within community groups and social clubs because groups and clubs create public places where citizens can enact their communicative roles within a democracy, for as Carlin, Schill, Levasseur, and King (2005) note, deliberation is a basic ingredient in a democratic society that is “essential to a healthy public sphere” (p. 619). Brown (2002) argues democracy exists within the daily deliberations amongst individuals—that “is in the day-to-day world of work and in ordinary conversations and discussions that political attitudes and collective judgments are formed by democratic publics” (p. 356)—exemplifying that deliberation bridges the gap between a democratic people and their government.

### **Deliberative Issues**

Some scholars, such as Morrow and Morrow (1999), question deliberation’s claims. They make the case that the U.S. Constitution’s framework was based on James Madison’s idea that “persuasion governs people; it does not enable the people to govern themselves. Under the model of political deliberation that Witherspoon and Madison

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<sup>1</sup> Ivie (1998) claims that view is complicated because “our identity as a democratic people is problematic by distrust of rhetoric as an instrument of public deliberation” (p. 491). Rhetoric can be viewed as either a helpful tool or as a means of deception. These concerns date back to Plato’s *Gorgias*, which extends the argument beyond whether rhetoric is good or bad, “or even that rhetoric can be used well or poorly, but that rhetoric is only a partial means of arriving at the truth” (Purcell & Chamberlain, 2005, p. 11).

promoted, an elite, conservative, educated, elected few governed the many” (p. 33), in short, that the structure of America’s democratic system was unequal. Ivie (2002) asserts that rational models of deliberation “masks [*sic*] elite privilege and power” (p. 284). The unintended consequences of these models need to be investigated. The procedures governing deliberations constitute the process’s participants and as a result certain people are excluded (Steffensmeier & Schenck-Hamlin, 2008). A number of groups or viewpoints may not be given a voice, while the process itself unequally privileges others. Carlin et al. (2005) note that

when a politician served as a participant in a deliberative group, he or she assumed an expert role and the other group members (assembled citizens) quickly took on the role of learners, thus creating a unidirectional flow of communication that produced significant learning at the expense of true dialogue. (p. 620)

How deliberation is practiced affects the outcome.

Scholars tout various communication models that address deliberation. Welsh (2002) points out “there are differences among competing versions of deliberative democracy” (p. 680). Eberly (2002) advances a conversational model: “While conversation may not be the soul of democracy, it just might help us discover democracy’s potentially deliberating bodies” (p. 295). However, if decision-making is the goal, then conversation might not be the solution. Tonn (2005) argues that conversational models can impede democratic outcomes. Ivie (1998) argues for a rhetoric model— “Understood as an exercise in rhetorical deliberation, however, democracy is constituted as strong, healthy, indigenous, robust, and enduring” (p. 501). Ivie (2002) criticizes deliberative theorists who omit rhetoric from their political conceptualizations because

politics is the practical practice of persuasion while Häuser and Benoit-Barne (2002) maintain that deliberative democracy's omission of rhetoric "keeps the discussion from focusing on how democracy actually works and from encouraging a culture of civic engagement that might make it work even better" (p. 261).

Communicative solutions to democracy may be situational instead of a one-size model fits all approach. Hicks (2002) warns "we should avoid the trap of positing some transcendent, universal powers to communication, where any model of dialogue, debate, or deliberation is thought to be adequate for all communities and all projects" (p. 256). Goodnight (2012) contends that deliberation "may become a lost art" because it is being diluted by "the increasing variety of forums, formats, styles, and institutional practices—each claiming to embody the public will or to represent the public voice" (p. 198), suggesting that if everything is deliberation, then nothing is.

Understanding the various versions of the ideal citizen exposes a society's character. Concepts of citizenship are discursively and rhetorically constructed. "Part of the ethos of the society is its definition of participation in society, its definition of citizenship, and its definition of what it takes to participate effectively—that is, its definition of virtue" (Sullivan, 1994, p. 73). The next section reviews the scholarly literature focused on the communication field's conversation concerning citizenship.

### **Citizenship**

The ideal citizen is conceptualized as being a good communicator. Greene (2003) asserts that rhetorical skills are one of the primary "attributes of good citizenship" (p. 192). Rhetoric and democratic citizenship have historically had a complimentary relationship. Hauser (2004) proclaims, "rhetoric is basic to public life" (p. 43) and plays a

prominent role in transforming individuals into competent citizens. Hartelius (2012) asserts that rhetoric's function throughout history has focused on the formation of "productive as well as critical citizens" (p. 170). An ideal citizen talks convincingly, analyzes statements, and is open-minded in the pursuit of facts (Smith, 1937). Citizens must be taught to be proficient public speakers so they can engage and help solve social issues (Welsh, 2002). Baker and Eubanks (1960) maintain that democratic values and principles are reflected in the primary objective of a rhetorical education that teaches "men and women to speak compellingly" (p. 73).

Ideal citizens are not born; they are made. Civic education is an important component in the development of democratic citizen. Murphy (2004) asserts that engaged, competent, and critical citizens are cultivated through "a rhetorical understanding of democratic practice and civil society" that teaches the "communication skills necessary for democratic citizenship" (p. 89). Gastil and Dillard (1999) refer to the "skills and habits of democratic citizenship" as "the art of group decision making" (p. 190). Martinez (2004) points out that civic education prepares individuals to be "responsible citizens within their own communities" (p. 368). Ideal citizens of the antebellum period joined debating clubs to enhance their democratic skills and to advance professionally (Ray, 2004). Contemporary civic education centers serve a similar societal function, providing a place where individuals can learn and practice the tools of political and community involvement.

In a democracy where decisions are deliberated, the ability to listen to each other becomes a necessary component for effective citizen engagement. Hicks (2002) examined the National Council of Social Studies' suggested practices of citizenship that

promote communicative skills such as “listen critically to others' points of view, anticipate and refute objections, and possess the proficiency of political judgment required to synthesize one's position with those offered by other stakeholders in a manner that addresses the root of the problem or dispute” (p. 232). While effective speaking and deliberating skills are highlighted, communication scholars claim that a democracy needs constructive “listener citizens” who are willing to suspend judgment (Beasley, 2008; Welsh, 2002). Democratic communication encompasses both the skills of speaking and listening. Carcasson and Sprain (2012) portray an ideal group of citizens who “come together and consider relevant facts and values from multiple points of view, [and] listen to one another in order to think critically about the various options before them” (p. 20).

Temple (1947) describes the “contributing citizen” as a person who is open-minded to a variety of different beliefs and ideas. Democracy encourages citizens to enlarge their sphere of awareness beyond self-interest (Deethardt, 1983). A democracy is composed of a diversity of people and their various viewpoints. An ideal democratic citizen is able to analyze the complexities of a current problem and has “a tolerance that is so much needed in our modern world” (Smith, 1937, p. 429). Democratic dialogue assumes “that participants are able to understand the worldview of the Other” (Heath et al., 2006, p. 362). Democratic citizenship transforms individuals into “civic actors” who “understand themselves as part of a larger community” and are capable of addressing and analyzing public issues and needs (Middaugh & Kahne, 2013, p. 99). To see oneself as a democratic citizen is to see oneself as a member of a shared society. “Participation emphasizes acts of citizenship that reflect membership in the community and political choice based on a sense of the common good” (Häuser & Benoit-Barne, 2002, p. 264).

Ideally, civic engagement centers provide places where people can voice their views regardless of how radical or marginalized they are. Ivie (2002) identifies another key communication component in democratic citizenship –dissent. “An absence of dissenting voices in a democracy is the true sign of weakness and vulnerability, of a deep distrust of democracy and a failing faith in freedom, whereas speaking out is the patriotic duty of democratic citizenship” (p. 454). Democratic dissent rests within the freedom of speech, which protects unpopular voices. Citizens need to be able to contest and “critically question assumptions” (Goldberg, Richburg & Wood, 2006, p. 131), and the ability and willingness to question power has been an American value throughout the history of the United States. Welsh (2002) warns that dissenters have to modify their language to be effective: “Challengers must speak in ways that are responsive to the political speech of a critical mass of fellow citizens” (p. 688). Even though radical views are protected, people still need to learn how to present their beliefs to the public in a persuasive manner. Ivie (2008) issues a similar solution, “dissenters especially must learn to critique society in a humanizing instead of demonizing idiom” (p. 454).

### **Citizenship Issues**

Deliberative models of democracy are based on an ideal citizen who may not exist in reality. Critics are unable to agree on the skills or characteristics of the democratic citizen. Rosenberg (2007) describes the problem as being that most people are incapable of democratic deliberation because they are: unable to think logically, rationally, or reasonably; have difficulty understanding hypotheticals, abstract ideas, or different cultural perspectives; unable to reflect on their own beliefs or other’s claims. Conboy and Steel (2008) argue that the “traditional notions of citizenship” have been destabilized (p.

658). Communicative versions of the involved citizen assume a “reasonable” person, which Bruner and Balter-Reitz (2013) argue is a fiction.

On the other hand, Steffensmeier and Schenck-Hamlin’s (2008) findings reveal that citizens, even as non-experts, are capable of comprehending and civilly debating competing policy positions: “We found that community members can deliberate in highly competitive environments without showing disrespect for various groups of people” (p. 32), suggesting that a person need not be an expert to participate in public debates. Zarefsky (2012) echoes this point that social knowledge, which is publicly available, becomes the standard for evaluation so that “no special expertise or training is required in order to participate” (p. 213).

The model citizen in early America was a “qualified” individual, usually a property owner who had a financial stake in maintaining the public good (Morrow & Morrow, 1999). Ray (2004) explains that during the antebellum era the “ideal participating citizen” was a “white, typically native born, ambitious Protestant” (p. 14) man. Inequality was the rule not the exception. Contemporary and historical concepts of the ideal citizen need to be critiqued, compared, and reevaluated. For example, Heath et al. (2006) argue that the communication norms of citizenship, which culturally construct conceptions of “competent participants,” have not changed but continue to be “contaminated by White standards and practices” today (p. 363), which raises the question of which groups or types of individuals are still excluded through definitions of and/or the ‘accepted’ practices of citizenship? In answer, the United States Constitution rhetorically frames an ideal citizen who has equal access to “the political process and

access to economic possibility,” –the realization of which continues to be a work in progress (Cheney & Cloud, 2006, p. 516).

Concepts of citizenship are not stagnant, but have changed over time. Citizenship is dynamic in that it evolves in relation to cultural conditions. At the turn of the twentieth century, Stob (2011) identified an emerging rhetorical vision of an economic citizen. “As early as 1898, he [Brandeis] insisted that pragmatism would help the American people understand the ‘cash value’ of their ideas” (p. 280). The nation’s health depended on the development of virtuous and “valuable citizens” (Stob, 2011). Citizenship is a contested site where competing ideologies converge. According to Murphy (2004), the 1920s and 30s witnessed Dewey and Lippman’s debate concerning whether a lack of basic competencies and citizenship skills were a systemic issue or a result of individual inadequacies. Murphy takes Dewey’s stance that “participation, interaction, and engagement with fellow citizens were the means by which citizens came to understand the world around them” (p. 76), and asserts that democratic practices can be enhanced through learning communication skills. Katula and Threnhauser (1999) argue for a modern approach based on Dewey’s idea that the means of participation transform along with society, by utilizing the technologies of the day. The democratic citizen is able to effectively deliberate decisions through both oratorical and modern discursive mediums from the telephone to the computer to social media.

Because there are “no ‘agreed upon’ definitions of citizenship” (Jarvis & Han, 2010, p. 36), civic education centers can communicate a variety of versions of the ideal American. Connected to the historical debate clubs and literary societies, these centers act as schools of democracy that teach community participation and political engagement

skills. Civic education, which discursively constructs the ideal citizen, highlights the importance of communication in a democratic society regardless of the definition of citizenship.

### **Civic Education**

Individual involvement within a democracy is rhetorical. Hauser (2004) posits that the communicative purpose of civic education is to prepare people for the public performance of citizenship. “We also have a birthright: rhetoric's role in civic education” (p. 52). Civic education, which teaches individuals how to be ideal citizens, is an important ingredient in a democratic society, for, as Temple (1947) noted years ago, “Education for democracy is ideally education for all the citizens for personal liberty and social responsibility” (p. 489). Thus, citizenship training prepares people in the ‘proper’ means of civic and political participation, a view Ivie (2002) emphasizes, “the prevailing assumption remains that the people must be properly educated to an appropriate level of civic literacy before they can be trusted to practice democracy safely” (p. 279).

Various group and societal beliefs about the ideal citizen are learned characteristics. Sullivan (1994) theorizes civic education as epideictic rhetoric that teaches citizenship through common community values. People have to learn how to share their beliefs and ideas discursively. Greene (2003) explains that rhetorical and communication practices are essential to the education of ethical and eloquent citizens. Throughout history, rhetoricians have had a noble tradition of training productive and critical citizens (Hartelius, 2012).

Rhetorical pedagogy within civic education stresses the importance of political and cultural competence. “Teachers of speech were to inculcate future citizens with the

moral and ethical virtues to fully and equally participate in democratic deliberation” (Hicks, 2002, p. 223). A solution to America’s democratic problem of participation rests within the civic education of the people, and according to Deethardt (1983), speech communication teachers are partially responsible for the direction of the United States future “whether it will be more, or less democratic” (p. 165). Gastil and Dillard (1999) assert that communication scholars make unique contributions and hold a distinct place in the civic education of citizens. “Since democracy functions largely through speech and speechmaking, rhetorical education has a special mission to perform in reaffirming the ideals of democracy” (Baker & Eubanks, 1960, p. 75). McDevitt and Kiouisis (2006) recognize that the discursive nature of democracy demands citizens who can effectively communicate and thus argue for deliberative education as a means of interpersonal development where “ordinary political talk” is learned. People engaging with each other in public are rhetorical actions, for “rhetoric matters because rhetoric—which demands engagement with the living—is the process through which public texts are not only produced but also understood to matter” (Eberly, 2002, p. 296).

The foundational roots of America’s civic education can be traced to John Dewey. Instructors who teach students using community engagement “are influenced consciously or unconsciously by the ideas of John Dewey regarding experiential education” (Britt, 2012, p. 82). Greene (2003) posits, “For rhetorical studies, Dewey provides both concrete methods and abstract concepts for manufacturing more democratic citizens who might reasonably deliberate on the public issues of the day” (p. 189). Murphy (2004) points out, “Dewey advocated restructuring the school curriculum and pedagogical focus of American education so that they emphasized principles of active learning, experiential

education, and the social ends of democratic education” (p. 76). The process of deliberative democracy is taught through hands-on practice. Katula and Threnhauser (1999) explain that Dewey believed in experience-based education because he was “concerned that students become active participants in American democracy” (p. 241).

Since our democracy depends on engaged citizens, by failing to teach the characteristics of the good citizen, Antczak (1989) believes “educators are failing our students individually and our community collectively” (p. 15). Civic education increases participation and it is therefore linked to the health of America’s democracy. Carcasson and Sprain (2012) argue, “when our democracy is weak, the problems in our communities get worse....Civic education at all levels has traditionally been a critical antidote to these problems” (p. 15). With the spread of standardization initiatives in educational curriculum, citizenship-training programs appear not to be a high academic priority. Mattson (2002) points out, “The decline in civic education turns up again and again in polls on citizens' political knowledge” (p. 328). If civic education is neglected, then Deethardt (1983) warns that “people in our society will not achieve civic competence and democracy will die” (p. 158). Next, the literature review examines the pedagogical approach of service learning and how it communicates civic education ideals.

### **Service Learning**

“Service-learning emerged in the 1990s as part of a shift towards experiential, project-based approaches to civic education” (Middaugh & Kahne, 2013, p. 100). Service learning, which has gained popularity across the educational system, teaches students democratic action through civic engagement experiences. At the university level,

“service-learning (SL) is a relatively new pedagogical approach to facilitate student learning” (Goldberg et al., 2006, p. 131). Secondary school teachers and higher education faculty are being encouraged to create curriculum that connects students to their local communities. This educational shift in focus shares its historical roots with civic education. Quintanilla and Wahl (2005) connect university-based service learning programs to John Dewey’s principles of education. The academy has traditionally been a site for democratic development. McKay and Estrella (2008) trace service-learning’s beginnings to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Across time, it has been “referred to by many names, [*sic*] historically it has been synonymous with social reconstruction, advocacy and activism” (p. 359). Whatever the name, service learning rhetorically actualizes civic education theories into academic curriculum.

According to Weintraub and Oppe (2003), service learning is a pedagogical tool that brings together the worlds of theory and practice through community-based civic engagement projects. Civic education programs create places where individuals can practice citizenship skills. As a type of experiential pedagogy, service learning brings “concrete experience into the learning model, providing students with a way to apply classroom concepts” (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, p. 238). University-based civic education programs connect students and faculty to community issues and local politics. Quintanilla and Wahl (2005) believe that “engaging in service learning projects is extremely valuable to university students as it allows them to apply and learn course concepts by having them solve authentic, real world problems with tangible outcomes” (p. 67).

Because civic education extends democratic lessons in engagement beyond the classroom into the lives of students and their communities, Middaugh and Kahne (2013) contend a student's effectiveness as a civic actor is increased through "service-learning, a popular approach to citizenship education in the US, [that] provides youth with opportunities to define and address public needs" (p. 99). Service learning projects give students an opportunity "to learn reflectively while fostering involvement in the community in which they live" (Martinez, 2004, p. 23). Bostdorff (2003) stresses the importance of service learning courses that teach students to be responsible citizens who benefit from community involvement and active participation, because they address the youth's political cynicism and encourage civic engagement. "Students express appreciation for the opportunity to become involved in the community beyond the campus" (Renz, 2003, p. 6). University-based civic education classes that emphasize student learning benefit both the students and the public.

National programs incentivize universities with grants and financial support. According to Liu (2011), some higher education institutions have made civic education a primary component of their missions. The Carnegie Foundation developed the Community Engagement Classification<sup>2</sup> in 2006 to encourage higher education institutions to create citizenship-focused curriculum and to join national civic education initiatives (Liu, 2011). Hartelius (2012) explains that the proliferation of civic education is partially a result of political influences and the academic system's fiscal decline. In response to these concerns, administrators have utilized service-learning courses as a

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<sup>2</sup> The centers investigated by this study are connected to universities that have earned Carnegie's Community Engagement Classification. I discuss in detail the Carnegie's Engagement Classification along with the American Democracy Project, National Issues Forums Institute, and Campus Compact in the Research Design chapter.

means to achieve outcomes that are manifested outside the university. “It is about accountability to those who pay the university’s bills and about pushing a larger narrative that says the university contributes to the public good” (McGowan, 2010, p. 413). On average, higher education bills are 48% paid by federal, state, and local government funding with another 27% coming from private gifts, grants and other fiscal sources. Tuition only accounts for 25% of a public institution’s revenue (United States Government Accountability Office, 2014).

Implementations of service learning programs vary because they have “to reflect the mission and culture of the sponsoring institution” (Goldberg et al., p. 144). Goldberg, Richburg and Wood (2006) outline the key components of service learning: experiential education, community service, student reflection, and citizenship roles. National programs, state level sponsors, and local supporters each have different priorities and focuses that can influence a university-based center’s concentration. Britt (2012) argues that the approaches, goals, and rationales for doing service learning are varied and contested. “Key differences are explicated in approaches to service-learning pedagogy that focus on (a) skill-set practice and reflexivity, (b) civic values and critical citizenship, and (c) social justice activism” (p. 80). Estrella and McKay (2008) posit that there is one aspect that connects all the varied versions of service learning—the goal of civic engagement.

Civic education is an experience, but not every experience is equal. Gaut and Whitfield (2003) explain that, “just like the ‘real world,’ service-learning is messy, and there are no guarantees” (p. 10). Service learning does not neatly fit into some of the

traditional definitions of teaching and research. “What engaged work aspires to achieve is ill captured by the term ‘scholarship’” (McGowan, 2010, p. 416).

### **Communicating Civic Education**

Service learning that teaches democratic engagement is a type of rhetorical pedagogy. Quintanilla and Wahl (2005) “believe that communication courses are rich sites for” learning and practicing democracy (p. 70), thus rhetorical pedagogy sits at the heart of the contemporary service learning movement. Communication service learning courses connect students to real-world settings and issues (Paradise, 2011; Scott, 2004; Tolman, 2005; Turnley, 2007). There is a complementary relationship between service learning and communication (Ahlfeldt, 2009)—they are inherent partners (Hochel & Witson, 2003), and “there exists a natural connection between civic engagement and the public speaking class” (Engen, 2005, p. 80). Effective democratic citizens ideally have effective communication skills. Murphy (2004) claims, “there is an obvious yet perhaps underappreciated relationship between communication education and democratic citizenship” (p. 89).

Weintraub and Oppe (2003) point out that communication educators have started adding service learning to their curriculum in the last several years. “Within the last decade, service-learning has experienced impressive growth in higher education, particularly within communication departments” (Paradise, 2011, p. 234). National organizations have encouraged university-based programs. Funded by grants, “the National Communication Association has worked to increase the awareness of service-learning within the discipline and to help educators employ service-learning in their classrooms” (Weintraub & Oppe, p. 1). Deliberative projects and community

conversations connect citizenship training to curriculum. Bostdorff (2003) contends, “political communication courses are ideal venues for citizenship-based service learning” (p. 11). Public sphere scholarship lays a theoretical foundation for understanding civic education centers as physical spaces that bring individuals and ideas together.

### **Public Sphere**

Carlin et al. (2005) define the public sphere as a “marketplace of ideas,” that “provide[s] a safe place to speak out, to listen, to analyze, and to seek common ground” (p. 635). Welsh (2002) describes public spheres as neutral places where people can meet to discuss community interests. The people need public places where their acts of political participation can play out and civic education centers as voluntary association served those purposes. As public spheres, centers provide places where people can physically engage each other. Asen (1999) outlines the sphere’s bourgeois characteristics: “access is guaranteed to all citizens; citizens debate openly; and citizens’ debate matters of general interest” (p. 117). Murphy (2004) contends, “nearly all definitions of civil society have in common an emphasis on a space of association” (p. 82). Democratic associations are ideally open to everyone along with their various voices and values.<sup>3</sup> Lee (1986) describes the populist view that the public sphere transformed the American republic into the American democracy: “they insist that the move from representation to participation is not merely another incremental step but a revolutionary transformation of the political system” (p. 285).

The public sphere’s participatory purpose is realized through the enactment of deliberative democracy, which depends on “the rhetorical practices within and among

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<sup>3</sup> Phillips (1996) disputes the utopian view of the public sphere; “the insidious aspects of declaring an arena open to all is that it obscures the differences...justifies blaming the victims of exclusion for their status” (p. 238).

civil society's public spheres" (p. 262) that function through "the vast network of associations between the family and the state" (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002, p. 266). The public sphere is built around the people and their various social networks. "Here lies Arendt's remarkable insight: the social, though it is antipolitical, paradoxically dominates the public sphere in modern nation-states" (Kakita, 2007, p. 416). In the United States, citizen-to-citizen relations, which are not overtly political, were a central component of the democratic process. Deethardt (1983) portrays the public sphere as a social process that brings "members of society into situations where they have to test again and again whether free speech is good for society and is therefore a valid right" (p. 158). Murphy (2004) connects the public sphere to civil society as a rhetorical construction that socialized individuals through political participation. As a process of mediation, civil society appears in multiple formats across a variety of arenas where "citizens engage in deliberation with fellow citizens and come to understand public issues and systems of democratic self-governance" (p. 84). Civic education centers enter communication scholarship through the public sphere upon which the foundation of civil society and democratic citizenship are built.

### **State of the Public Sphere**

Asen (1999) notes an ongoing conversation concerning the state of the public sphere and whether it is in decline or in a historical process of transformation: "A growing, interdisciplinary literature has developed around the theme of 'the end of the public sphere'" (p 115). Goodnight believes "that the public sphere is being steadily eroded" (p. 205). The public sphere's perceived decline is not a new phenomenon. Goodnight (2012) argues that the current causes of the deterioration are a result of the

modern elevation of personal opinion in public argument. The public sphere is being shrunk, as individual interests are replacing concern for the common good. Citizen engagement or political action creates the public sphere, which, in turn, encourages more individual involvement. It is a circular process. According to Brown (2002), citizenship is intimately connected to the public sphere whose contraction challenges democracy: “As this public sphere is diminished, and as integral selfhood becomes harder to maintain, the role of the citizen becomes more difficult to enact” (p. 355). The sphere’s decline negatively affects citizen engagement that leads to a decrease in democratic participation, which further deteriorates the public sphere.

Carlin et al. (2005) join a chorus of communication scholars who are developing deliberative frameworks to solve the sphere’s collapse. “For the public sphere to prosper...there is need for regular and sustained discussions of public policy issues, especially in face-to-face settings” (p. 634). Civic education centers establish venues where people interact, and those interactions give life to the public sphere. However, Asen (1999) asserts the public square is not public and deliberative models that value difference and “recognizes a multiplicity of publics” are needed (p. 115). For the sphere to be a marketplace of ideas, a multitude of participants who have a diversity of beliefs and values are a necessary requirement.

What some see as a decline, others recognize as a recurring pattern. Gross (2012) maintains that the public sphere is not deteriorating but is being transformed in response to the times, which has been its historical nature. Goodnight (2012) traces the etymology of the term, public sphere, back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. “It may seem historically inevitable that all groundings of argument change as lifestyles are reconfigured, as

methods for discovering knowledge become modified, and as the institutions of governance change” (p. 200). The sphere reacts to cultural changes and societal situations. According to Tonn (2005), America’s rhetorical reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 revitalized the public sphere. “The events of 9/11, the onset of war with Afghanistan and Iraq, and the subsequent failure to locate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have resuscitated some faith in debate, argument, warrant, and facts as crucial to the public sphere” (p. 407). Discourses amongst individuals shape the public sphere and these affects may be amplified by major events. On the other hand, Carlin et al. (2005) contend that 9/11 did not cause any major consequences: “The public sphere in 2004 was not the idealized forum described by political theorists nor did it represent a completely changed world after September 11, 2001” (p. 632). As with weather patterns, multiple professionals can come to different predictions based on the same evidence. The public sphere acts as a type of societal barometer that measures the participatory atmosphere and can be used to forecast positive and negative trends in citizenship and democratic discourse.

### **Public Forums**

Practicing deliberation is seen as a means of teaching individuals how to be democratic citizens who participate in decision-making and to prepare future leaders. Ray (2004) explains that the United States’ deliberative history begins with college-based literary societies that were developed during the nation’s founding and became the model for debating clubs and the lyceum “self-education” movement that spread across the country, noting that “Civic debating societies proliferated in U.S. towns and cities after

1826” (p. 3). These civic education centers increased accessibility to democratic processes; however, the number of college and civic debate societies has dwindled.

Detailing the decrease in college and community-based organizations, Emerson (1931) contends, “the student finds today in the public speaking class much of what he formerly sought for in the debating society” (p. 367). The original debate and literary societies began as voluntary student organizations. While today, in many universities, public speaking is a required course, Emerson recommends a return to the old debating society format because “debating itself, has become more the privilege of a talented few, and that the organization of the activity has become less and less a matter of voluntary student initiative” (p. 375). In the mid 1970s, a majority of members of Congress “had participated in college debate” (Williams, McGee, & Worth, 2001, p. 206).<sup>4</sup> Smith (1937) argues that debate training “is training for life...because debate does train students for participation in the activities which confront them in their lives” (p. 426). Civic education centers, which encourage deliberation and debate, serve a similar function as the old debate societies.

One underlying component that connects civic education centers to each other is that they are public. Rhetoric can contribute to an understanding of the different realms and forms the centers might take, as Eberly (2002) envisions classrooms as public spheres where students can engage the art of rhetoric—a sentiment that McGowan (2010) shares, that higher education should act as “a model public sphere” (p. 416). The process of practicing public discourse expands the sphere into the academy as a means of civic education.

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<sup>4</sup> In the 1980s, the positive effects of college debate were starting to be questioned. During this time, Littlefield (2001) asserts “over the past twenty years, the nature and benefits of interscholastic debate have come under scrutiny” (p. 83).

Deethardt (1983) asserts civic culture would benefit from the development of secondary school/university, community-based, and political network forums. “Civic organizations such as community centers, day-care facilities, nursing homes, homeless shelters, neighborhood groups, and ethnic associations provide a powerful tool of civic revival and a necessary foothold for political participation” (Hicks, 2002, p. 234). Community, government, and academic forces shape public spheres. They provide forums where citizens can gather to “talk about pressing issues of public importance” (Mattson, 2002, p. 327). In contemporary communities, these discourses can be communicated face-to-face or across mediated mediums that incorporate current technologies. Warnick (1998) believes communication has a crucial role in examining the implications of digital engagement. “The question of how and whether computer-simulated political participation affects the public sphere can be fruitfully addressed by rhetoricians” (p. 81).

Political and community engagement exists within the realm of experience. As idealized associations, Murphy (2004) maintains that various democratic initiatives such as the Study Circles Resource Center (2003), the National Issues Forums (NIF) (2003),<sup>5</sup> and the Center for Deliberative Polling (2003) attempt to reanimate the American public by providing opportunities for citizens to participate in structured forms of deliberation on issues of public importance. (p. 78)

The democratic problem of participation is addressed through individual involvement in a variety of public forums. Gastil and Dillard (1999) posit that the goal of programs like the NIF is the development of deliberative skills “and habits of democratic citizenship” (p.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Issues Forums Institute is examined in detail in the Research Method’s chapter.

190). Various concepts of the ideal citizen are taught and enacted within these public forums.

One communication-based school of thought places the art of argument at the heart of democratic citizenship. Osborn and Osborn (1995) warn that argument, an important element to a healthy civic discourse, has been rhetorically cleansed from NIF forums. “In the world of conviction and purpose, much of our identity as moral agents depends upon the seriousness, care, and artistry by which we devise arguments that support, justify, and enact the faith by which we live” (p. 251). Forums become contested sites where citizen ideals are rhetorically constructed through arguments. Steffensmeier and Schenck-Hamlin (2008) found “that issue forums and public hearings alike provided vibrant and civil spaces for public argument” (p. 21). The rhetorical reach of civic education extends citizenship from local issues to national politics. For Zarefsky (2012), “argumentation in the public sphere at least potentially affects everyone within a polity or community. It concerns people generally, in their capacity as citizens” (p. 213). This discussion demonstrates how argumentation and public sphere scholarship intersect within conversations concerning civic forums.

Civic education centers, which have developed in response to the times as “a space of association” (Murphy, 2004, p. 82), are public spheres. These centers create a communicative space where deliberations concerning community affairs and political issues are possible. They provide arenas where networks between individuals and the state can be formed. University-based centers rely on student workers and volunteers and, as a result, many are organized around a nonprofit structure that has a specific set of communication needs.

## **Nonprofit Organizations**

The nonprofit sector has become a focus of organizational communication scholars (Murphy & Dixon, 2012). Lewis, Hamel, and Richardson (2001) identify three major types of nonprofits: philanthropic (health, education, religion), mutual benefit (chambers of commerce, professional associations/unions, social clubs) and advocacy organizations (political parties, citizen group, lobbying groups). Meisenbach and Kramer (2014) arrange them into another three categories. “First, leisure organizations primarily offer socializing and recreational opportunities. Interest organizations represent and sometimes defend the interests of the organization’s members. Finally, activist organizations advocate for change in the behavior and attitudes of individuals and societies” (p. 188). As academic organizations, civic education centers span the spectrum of nonprofit types: social clubs, advocacy groups, and a variety of other formats. Lewis (2005) explains that the nonprofit sector is a growing phenomenon across the world and the key criteria for defining them are debated. His broad definition includes “membership associations, local community groups, clubs, churches, health care providers, educational institutions, social service agencies, advocacy groups, and a myriad more” (p. 239). Nonprofits perform critical services from private to political to business to religious (Kirby & Koschmann, 2012). According to Lewis (2011), nonprofits grapple “with ‘big questions’ such as solving intractable societal problems” (p. 188). As part of this nonprofit system, university-based civic education centers provide students a means to encounter a host of community and political issues.

## **Non-Profit Volunteers**

Lewis (2005) identifies three types of volunteers: temporary, corporate, and interim. “Students in service learning roles, experts consulting for organizations on a specific project, or court-ordered volunteers doing community service hours would be examples of the interim volunteer” (p. 260).<sup>6</sup> In order to understand nonprofits, individual level communication—the volunteer—becomes an important research area (Isbell, 2012). Although volunteers are the backbone of voluntary associations, McNamee and Peterson (2014) assert they represent a third space, which is “relegated in importance beneath employment and family commitments” (p. 215).

Communication researchers are able to investigate the lived experiences and “interrogate language and discourse,” examining how “taken-for-granted terms like ‘nonprofit’ and ‘volunteer’ enable/restrict organizational activity” (Kirby & Koschmann, 2012, p. 134). Koschmann (2012) explains that other taken for granted terms such as “faith-based, and mission enable symbolic action within specific discourse communities” and communicatively constitute the organizations (p. 143). McAllum (2014) challenges the common definitions of volunteers, which include “free will, lack of financial gain, and benefit to others” (p. 84) and he claims that their identities are communicatively shaped by the organizations. Individual identities are influenced by the discourse of the groups and associations in which they belong. “Multiple identifications are enacted in talk about voluntary membership decisions” (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014, p. 193). Gills and Wells (2014) found that organizations were adjusting their missions to match volunteer expectations.

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<sup>6</sup> The student volunteers interviewed for this investigation fall into the interim category.

Whereas in the past, individuals were encouraged to identify with the already established values and goals of an NPO [Nonprofit Organization], NPOs now seek to meet donors/volunteers on their own terms, in their own 'field,' and thus align with their political causes and 'likes.' (p. 47)

Meisenbach and Kramer (2014) also found that nonprofit activities hold a more important role in individual identification than identity with the organization.

One method to gain a better understanding of an organization is through an examination of its managers' and members' rhetoric. Koschmann (2012) maintains, "a communication approach should therefore lead us to think about nonprofits in more phenomenological ways that understand nonprofits based on the lived experiences of relevant stakeholders" (p. 141). People participate in nonprofits as a means of addressing community problems and, as a result, they might encounter situations that are emotionally challenging. Eschenfelder (2012) posits that nonprofit work entails an emotional labor, because in connecting with social issues "nonprofit workers often deal with people who are sick, abusive or abused, down on their luck, without homes, or dealing with life histories beyond most people's imagination" (p. 175). Eschenfelder (2012) envisions a special place for organizational communication scholars who could identify these emotions and theoretically develop communicative strategies to address their negative effects. The proliferation of volunteering as a way for people to connect with social issues has dominated contemporary civic engagement conversations (Ganesh & McAllum, 2011). Nonprofits, as public spheres, provide safe spaces where people engage local and national politics and other social issues. However, there can be a tension

between a center's altruistic rhetoric and the economic realities of having to operate an organization.

### **Economic Tensions**

Nonprofits have to communicate an identity that balances “the meaningfulness of nonprofit work as well as the economic sustainability of their operations” (Sanders, 2012, p. 183). Kirby and Koschmann (2012) argue that the tension between economic and social functions is “a central ontological feature” of nonprofits (p. 136). The dependence of nonprofits on donors brings into question whose interests are being served (McAllum, 2014). Nonprofits have historically had a reliance on corporate and government sponsors. “In the last two decades, this dependency has been articulated in terms of ‘partnerships’ between civil society organizations and businesses or government agencies” (Ganesh & McAllum, 2011, p. 152). Grants and gifts usually come with sponsor mandates and/or guidelines on what projects will be financially assisted. University-based civic education centers receive monetary support from a variety of sources.

Dempsey (2012) challenges the idea of nonprofits as ‘sacred spaces’ outside of market forces and points out the problematic nature of “their partnerships with corporations and funding agencies” (p. 148). University programs often partner with local businesses and/or government agencies providing a portion of their financing. Civic education centers have operating costs and those who help them cover those costs could influence their missions. Clair and Anderson (2013) explain, “nonprofit organizations walk a fine line between devoting funds toward ways of gaining funds and devoting funds to the needy” (p. 557). A civic organization is still a business with an administrative budget, advertising expenses, and the cost of providing their services.

“Nevertheless, nonprofit organizations cannot function outside of the realities of the market economies in which they pursue their work” (Sanders, 2012, p. 181).

Mission and purpose statements are an organization’s rhetorical face. Koschmann (2012) urges scholars examining nonprofits to “theorize mission statements from a communication perspective” (p. 139). These statements provide the discursive justification for an organization’s existence. Nonprofit legitimacy is usually based on behavior, whether or not the organization does what it says it does. Gill and Wells (2014) contend that nonprofits rhetorically construct their identities to meet the expectation of their donors: “We adopt the term donor gaze to refer to how NPOs may privilege the values, symbols, and practices of the donors/volunteers” (p. 46). As nonprofit organizations, civic education centers have to balance mission statements, donor/sponsor expectations, and operational realities. They have to communicate their legitimacy, for as Lewis (2005) notes, the “relationships between perceived mission clarity, assessment metrics, and narratives of ‘success’ or ‘failure’” (p. 254). What counts as quality service is contested, but one reliable metric is “the responsiveness of the organization to the needs of its stakeholders is an important indicator of its success” (Lewis et al., 2001, p. 7).

The above literature review connects the field of communication to civic education centers and the democratic problem of participation through the scholarly convergence amongst the areas of deliberative democracy, citizenship, civic education, the public sphere, and nonprofit organizations. The second major section further details the communication scholarship and cultural context that surrounded the rise of the contemporary centers by examining the literature from 1980 to 2013. The review reveals

some of the theoretical conversations communication scholars were having during the centers' development. In order to gain a fuller picture of the civic education centers as a genre, this study delves into the debates concerning the democratic problem of participation and the various rhetorical solutions that were proposed and enacted (See Figure 2).

<p><b>Section 1: Literature Review</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deliberative Democracy</li><li>• Citizenship</li><li>• Civic Education</li><li>• Public Sphere</li><li>• Nonprofit Organizations</li></ul> <p><b>Section 2: Contemporary Civic Education Centers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1980's: The Age of Television</li><li>• 1990's: Rise of the Consumer Citizen</li><li>• 2000 – 2013: The Age of Social Capital</li></ul>
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*Figure 2.* Chapter Two Contents

### **Contemporary Civic Education Centers: 1980 to 2013**

This investigation focuses on contemporary conceptions of the democratic problem of participation and the civic education centers created in response.<sup>7</sup> According to David Mathews (2010), one of the founders of the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), a Tocquevillian alliance of modern voluntary associations began forming in the

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<sup>7</sup> First, I searched for books that addressed the broad issues of citizenship and civic engagement. Next, I privileged texts that painted a picture of what the author perceived as a problem of their era. When possible I found two books by the same author(s) in order to see whether or not their perspectives changed over time. I choose three books from the 1980s (Strong Democracy, Barber; Habits of the Heart, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton; Amusing ourselves to Death, Postman) and the 1990s (The Good Society, Bellah et al.; Political Liberalism, Rawls; McJihad, Barber), and four from the 2000s (Bowling Alone, Putnam; Better Together, Putman and Feldstein; Real American Ethics, Borgman; Healing the Heart of Democracy, Palmer). Finally, I performed a Communication and Mass Media Complete database search for peer reviewed articles from each decade that addressed the books directly and/or the themes of citizenship, civic engagement, deliberative democracy/dialogue and political participation. For each decade, I performed an abstract search for the terms citizenship and civic engagement/political participation, deliberative democracy and civic engagement/political participation, dialogue and civic engagement/political participation, and new media and civic engagement/political participation.

late 1970s and in the 1980s and developed into a growing civic education movement.

This section reviews a sample of the communication context and scholarly conversations surrounding the contemporary civic education movement between 1980 and 2013 and is divided into three time periods: 1980s, 1990s, and 2000 – 2013.

### **1980s: The Age of Television**

Neil Postman (1985), media theorist and cultural critic, defined the early 1980s as “a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not by the printed word” (p. 28). More and more news stories were being communicated through broadcast instead of print. McCombs (1983) documented a decline “from 80% to 67%” in daily newspaper reading by 1980 (p. 5). Television was becoming the communication medium of choice. Neuman (1982) described television “as the truly dominant mass medium in American society... ninety-eight percent of American homes have sets and those sets are turned on for an average of about seven hours a day” (p. 471). According to James (1983), a new wave of media connected to television was being developed. The United States was in a state of a mass media transition.

Coulson (1980) detailed the loss of independent newspapers to chain mergers and a conglomeration of the communications industry. “CBS, RCA, Time, Inc., Times-Mirror, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* all own radio and television stations, all publish books, all except one (RCA) publish magazines and all except two (CBS and RCA) publish newspapers” (p. 82). Local and community news organizations were being overshadowed by national “agenda setting” organizations (Tardy, Guaghan, Hemphill, & Crockett, 1981). As news and information sources were being corporately combined and commoditized, their role in American society was questioned. Books, such

as, *The Press and the Decline of Democracy*, critiqued these new media realities and examined their “social benefit and corresponding responsibilities” (Wilkins, 1986, p. 103). The rise of television and media consolidation was seen as negatively affecting the democratic system. Mutz (1985) states that the book, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics*, “like many others before it, rushes to attribute the problems of contemporary American politics to the rise of mass media” (p. 750). Kazzee (1981) found that many contemporary studies were linking media exposure to “changes in political attitudes and orientations” (p. 507). New media mediums were privatizing and personalizing the public sphere and limiting face-to-face engagement. The period’s democratic problems of participation were being connected to the changes and advances in media mediums.

News was becoming sensationalized. Mogavero (1984) saw a shift in the focus of media stories “to the event itself. The result today, is an extensive rendition of what happened, with little and sometimes no mention of why it happened” (p. 51). Postman (1985) argued that entertainment became the ideology driving television discourse. “No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure” (p. 87). He saw an era where political engagement was being replaced by popular entertainment. Postman warned,

when a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility. (pp. 155-6)

The traditional civic associations where citizens gathered to deliberate community and societal issues were failing because of the rise of new forms of media. “If democracy entails the right to govern ourselves rather than to be governed in accordance with our interests, then liberal democratic institutions fall short of being democratic” (Barber, p. xv). American democracy as a communicative process was in crisis (1984/1990), and developing a problem of participation.

Citizen engagement, a fundamental element of the American system, was in distress. Democratic participation was declining and it was a problem that needed to be solved. New organizations and community systems would need to be developed to deal with the age’s problem of participation. According to Ventriss (1985), Barber promoted an educational solution where civic virtues are accomplished through actual practice (p. 437): “I wish to argue that the way to make good on the promise of citizenship is to make citizenship stand for something more than taxpaying and voting” (Barber, 1990/1984, p. xxvii). The ideal citizen is involved in community affairs and political policy decisions, but the American public was not involved in the political process. Adamson (1989) says Barber’s analysis in *Super Democracy* identified “the central problem as one of civic apathy” (p. 131). Barber proposed a version of civic education as a solution, which he termed strong democracy:

a distinctively modern form of participatory democracy. It rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature. (p. 117)

Barber sought to achieve institutional reform through “strong democratic talk” that was defined as “neighborhood assemblies, television town meetings and a civic communications cooperative, civic education and equal access to information, representative town meetings, and office-holding by lot” (Gill, 1985, p. 197). Civic education centers were sought as a rhetorical response to the problems of participation. They provided places where individuals could learn the skills of citizenship through local involvement. In this vein, Wallace (1989) similarly posited that community communication networks are needed to encourage local engagement, noting, “The organizations include civic groups, churches and synagogues, politics and government, mass media, schools and libraries, police and businesses” (p. 441). Barber's recommendations to return to town hall and civic group meetings focus on face-to-face and local levels of engagement (Mitchell, 1986). In responding to the participatory problems of the period, the creation of present-day civic education centers became a movement.

**Contemporary civic education movement.** David Mathews (1985) documented the contemporary civic education movement's beginnings: “In the summer of 1981, representatives of fourteen civic and educational organizations met...They called their joint enterprise the Domestic Policy Association. It was to be a voluntary association” (p. 75). As a result, the National Issues Forums (NIF),<sup>8</sup> which concentrates on conversations, was established in 1982 (Mathews, 1985). The NIF forums were created to address the crisis in citizen involvement and national declines in civic engagement—the democratic problem of participation. Gill (1985) asked, “Would the National Issues Forums of the Domestic Policy Association satisfy Barber's requirements?” (p. 197). National

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<sup>8</sup> The NIF was later renamed the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI).

organizations were being developed to civically educate the people. In 1985, Campus Compact, “the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement,” was founded “by the presidents of Brown, Georgetown, Stanford Universities, and the president of the Education Commission of the States” (Mission & Vision, 2016).

Civic education centers with the communicative purpose of teaching citizen participation and community involvement began developing “so by 1989, a handful of regional public policy institutes had cropped up around the country, typically housed on college and university campuses” (London, 2010, p. 7). Sociologists Robert Bellah et al. (1985) revealed a vision of a similar concept, the “Administered Society” that would create partnerships between private and public groups, working from the understanding that, “creating local institutions of self-help in poor and working-class neighborhoods draws previously uninvolved citizens not only into the politics of community, but into the larger arena of interest politics on the citywide level and beyond as well” (p. 216). They identified self-interest, an affinity for others, and generosity of spirit as paths to political participation through civic education (Bellah et al., 1985). From the same decade, Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen (2004) analyzed a variety of high social capital organizations and projects such as in the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (founded January 1985) that focused on community issues and local politics.

The period’s democratic problem of participation was attributed to the rise of television, the conglomeration of large news organizations, and the failure of traditional institutions, the latter of which had fostered political and community engagement in the past. New media was personalizing entertainment and shrinking the public sphere. A

civic education movement developed in response, which sought to bring people physically together around community affairs and political issues. Next, I examine how these issues were conceptualized and some of the solutions that arose in 1990s.

### **1990s: Rise of the Consumer Citizen**

Robert Bellah et al. (1992) saw the 1990s culture as a convergence of economic and political citizenship that created a new entity—the consumer citizen. Benjamin Barber (1995/2001) argued that capitalism was affecting American democracy: “When profit becomes the sole criterion by which we measure every good, every activity, every attitude, every cultural product, there is soon nothing but profit” (p. 98). The democratic citizen was being transformed into a capitalistic consumer. From Barber’s perspective, civil society, which encouraged open and free conversation, was being closed off not through government regulation but via corporate interests.

It is only when individuals who thought of themselves as citizens began to see themselves as consumers and groups that were regarded as voluntary associations were supplanted by corporations legitimized as ‘legal persons’ that market forces began to encroach on and crush civil society from the private sector side. (p. 282)

The corporatization of communities privatized the public sphere, transforming civic centers into commercial markets. “The commercialization of culture and its consequences for democratic public life have long been a central concern in mass communication studies” (James, 1998, p. 155). Consumerism was influencing society and individual behavior triggering a modern variation of the democratic problem of participation.

As in the 1980s, in the 1990s, civic education, which taught individual involvement, was a rhetorical response to America’s recurring problem of participation.

Robert Bellah et al. (1992) argued that the teaching of participatory citizenship “is an essential task for a free society in the modern world” (p. 177). Individuals learn how to have an affect on their lives and communities through involvement in civic education centers, public places where people can practice the skills of citizenship. John Rawls (1993/2005) defined democracy through citizen engagement—“The safety of democratic liberties requires the active participation of citizens who possess the political virtues needed to maintain a constitutional regime” (p. 205). Citizen participation is necessary for the survival of a democracy.

The First Amendment right of assembly makes democratic engagement possible in America. Rawls (1993/2005) proclaimed, “here we should observe that freedom of association is required to give effect to liberty of conscience; for unless we are at liberty to associate with other like-minded citizens, the exercise of liberty of conscience is denied” (p. 313). Citizens need shared spaces where they can come together, as Hauser (1998), explains, “the nature of the public sphere is, arguably, the central consideration conditioning the possibility of a participatory public life” (p. 20). Government, education, and community-based civic education centers were formed and funded by foundations and specialized projects to provide public places. According to McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) “local public issues forums have become increasingly popular as devices for reinvigorating democracy” (p. 316).<sup>9</sup>

The growing civic education movement, which started in the 1980s, took on new formats in the 1990s. According to Collins-Jarvis (1993), “in the past 20 years, new forms of electronic media have emerged to the accompaniment of grand hopes for their

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<sup>9</sup> AmericaSpeaks, an advocacy focused organization, was started in 1995 “to provide citizens with a greater voice in the policymaking process and to develop new institutions that can strengthen our democracy” (About Us, 2010).

ability to rekindle the democratic political involvement of a seemingly apathetic American public” (p. 49-51). Technological forms of civic education centers were seen as possibly being a modern answer to the country’s participatory problems (O’Sullivan, 1995). Tambini (1999) explains that the popularity of computers increased interest in “the internet as the new ‘third sphere’ of free public deliberation, untainted by state or commerce” (p. 306). The 1990s’ new media was defined through the emergence of electronic mail, electronic bulletin boards, city hall web pages, internet cafés, home computer ownership, word processors, private modems, interactive cable TV, teleconferencing, government sponsored computer networks, and a few newly connected libraries and schools (Goper, 1999; O’Sullivan, 1995; Tambini, 1999). Goodnight (1997) predicted, “publics of the year 2000 are likely to be challenged by questions of both technology and identity” (p. 275). The next section explores the participatory challenges and rhetorical responses the United States encountered during the 2000s.

### **2000 - 2013: The Age of Social Capital**

Political scientist Robert Putnam’s (2000) *Bowling Alone* directed the focus of many researchers towards the democratic problem of participation. Putnam’s comprehensive study traced the loss of “social capital,” which takes the form of civic knowledge and active involvement, from 1973 to 1994 in America.<sup>10</sup> “Over the last two decades the number of office seekers...from school board to town council—shrank by perhaps 15 percent....Americans lost more than a quarter million candidates annually to choose among” (p. 42). Putman connected this loss of choices to a decline in political

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<sup>10</sup> Some challenged the focus on Putnam’s social capital calculations and the correctness of his conclusions. Maras (2006) dismissed Putnam’s work “as a form of TV scapegoating” (p. 88). Asen (2004) countered the social capital model, which he contended had negatively biased results, with a discourse model of citizenship that doesn’t count group activities but focuses on the personal process of democracy.

engagement and individual involvement in clubs, political parties, local organizations, school affairs, political rallies and people giving speeches.<sup>11</sup> He claims that these “activities that brought citizens together, those activities that most clearly embody social capital...have declined most rapidly” (p. 45). As scholars heeding Putnam’s warnings investigated various aspects of America’s democratic culture, the democratic problem of participation was re-conceptualized as social capital, which became “a fashionable umbrella term” (Kanervo, Zhang, & Sawyer, 2005).

Lee, Cappella, and Southwell’s (2003) research revealed that the United States democratic system was suffering from declines in trust between fellow citizens that was connected to an overall drop in civic participation. Individuals belonged to associations, but instead of community-based organizations, they were interest and ideology focused. Briand (2005) observed, “more and more, we choose to live our lives in the company of those who share our own belief system” (p. 15). People were limiting their interactions with ‘the other’. Rosenberg (2007) argued that the twentieth century had been transformed by “a balkanization of society in which social affiliation, values and trust are increasingly limited to one’s particular ethnic, racial and religious group” (p. 336). Local and national organizations were becoming exclusionary and private, instead of inclusive and public. People were customizing their communities to match their beliefs. America’s democracy was losing a fundamental civic engagement element—diversity. The

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<sup>11</sup> Albert Borgman (2006), cultural philosopher, contested Putnam claims that there was a dangerous loss of democratic engagement. “There is little evidence that overall this is in fact happening. It might be that civic-mindedness is simply becoming dispensable, that social machineries are beginning to provide the stability and affluence that once required voluntary associations, and that screens large and small are more and more replacing the pleasures that once we gave and received from each other in bowling leagues and at dinner tables” (p. 126). Hauser and Benoit-Barne (2002) also disagreed with Putnam’s warning of a decline in association: “the evidence still indicates that associative bonds remain a significant national defining feature” (p. 266).

digitization of democracy and day-to-day social interactions was seen as contributing to the deterioration of civic and political involvement.

**Digital democracy.** As in the 1980s and 1990s, various scholars continued to blame media for the country's civic and political participation problems (Wilkins, 2000). Sproule (2002) asserted that technology, media, and entertainment were overwhelming democratic practices. Putnam and Feldstein (2004) placed the blame on "a variety of technological and economic and social changes—television, two career families, urban sprawl, and so on—has rendered obsolete a good share of America's stock of social capital" (p. 4). During the last decade, new communication technologies and media mediums were developed and proliferated across society. A variety of digital discourse tools (i.e., iPhone, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) gained popularity, which transformed the nature of political participation and civic engagement. Modern technology extended our understandings of the ideal citizen into the digital realm and across global communities,<sup>12</sup> so much so that it led Bole and Gordon (2009) to proclaim, "in a time of profound national challenge and change, it is important to promote a new definition of active citizenship locally, nationally and globally" (p. 273).

Digital civic associations were seen as a solution to our political participation problems. According to Bole and Gordon (2009), "blogs, forums and regional, national and international policy and issue coalitions have all expanded as a result of the Internet, coalescing in vibrant online communities" (p. 283). As an embodiment of contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> Research into the internet's impact on political engagement and civic life have produced mixed results becoming a space of scholarly contention and disagreement (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004, Boulianne, 2009, Yang, 2009). "It has been suggested that the recent Internet 'revolution' offers both opportunities and barriers to enhanced political participation and democracy" (Conboy & Steel, 2008, p. 657). Some scholars found positive relationships between social media use and "civic engagement, and political participation" (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009, p. 875).

media, the blogosphere created discourse communities (Giroux, 2011). The internet established innovative paths to civic engagement and opened new avenues to representative/constituent communication. Bucy and Geggson (2001) argued, “new media formats have made accessible to citizens a political system that had become highly orchestrated professionalized and exclusionary” (p. 357). Civic education centers were being realized in electronic spaces. Moving from the digital to the physical, the present-day manifestations of the centers are explored next.

**Contemporary civic education centers.** After identifying democratic failures, Putnam and Feldstein (2004) sought out the successes. They analyzed high social capital associations and projects as singular case studies, and examined their effects on individual groups and/or specific communities (Putnam & Feldstein, 2004). A solution they discovered to increasing community involvement and political participation was “federation: nesting small groups within larger groups” (p. 278). Civic organizations are nested within communities. Palmer (2011) called for a return to Tocqueville’s voluntary association theorizing civic education centers as physical places “to teach democratic habits of the heart” where concepts of community are expanded through lived encounters of “democracy in action.” Civic education centers were again seen as a primary place where democratic practices and civic values are taught.

In 2002, the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation was designed to create an interdisciplinary infrastructure for this type of organizational development, so that by “May 2012, the Coalition’s membership has grown to include more than 1,700 organizations and individuals” (What We’re All About, 2017). Community, government and academic-based civic education programs and associations were developed and

sought to tackle the democratic problem of participation, through a variety of practices.<sup>13</sup> The American Democracy Project, which is focused on political advocacy, “began in 2003 as an initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), in partnership with The New York Times [sic]” (American Democracy Project, n.d.). National and local organizations were created to civically educate individuals to be ideal citizens.

Modern responses to the democratic problem of participation conceptualize traditional, technological, and personal variations of civic education centers. The 2000s were marked by a seemingly exponential increase in the use of the internet as a primary source of both a private and mass media communication medium. The ring of Putnam’s quantitative-based alarm concerning the state of community and political involvement in the United States vibrated across disciplines. New media solutions and revitalizations of the old public forms were sought. The following conclusion brings the decades (1980s-2000s) together to reveal the patterns and themes that emerged around the democratic problem of participation as a recurring situation and reveal civic education centers as a shared solution.

### **Conclusion**

The first section of the review examined the communication topics of deliberative democracy, citizenship, civic education, the public sphere, and nonprofit organizations and how they are brought together by my investigation into civic education centers.

Viewed through a communicative lens, the United States system of government is

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<sup>13</sup> Borgman (2006) argued against the trend of engineering authentic activities and instead advocated for designing spaces, which encourage engagement. “There can be little doubt then that we are vigorously shaping public space through government and business and that the shape channels our moral conduct” (p. 180).

envisioned as a deliberative democracy. Deliberation, a decision-making process, and democracy, which by definition requires citizen input, complement each other. This rhetorical combination constructs an active version of ideal citizenship that encourages discourse amongst individuals and their representatives. Democracy becomes a coming together of the people to work through differences in order to solve societal and political issues. Ideal citizens are not born, but are the product of civic education that contributes to a functioning democratic society. The principles of citizenship that are taught in civic education centers connect the participants to the rhetorical history of democracy help to prepare them to become active citizens.

How citizenship is taught and discursively constructed has concerned scholars since ancient Greece. Civic education programs teach people the skills to participate in a democracy. In bringing individuals and their viewpoints together, civic education centers act a public spheres. Within these associations, personal beliefs, group values, and civic matters are debated and discussed. These physical spaces become democratic forums where community affairs and political disputes are addressed. Lastly, with student volunteers as their primary workforce, the university-based centers, which are the focus of this investigation, function as non-profit organizations. Organizational communication studies the genre of non-profits and found that they must balance their communicated missions with the financial realities of enactment. The field of communication connects civic education centers to the democratic problem of participation.

The second major section of my review explored the period from 1980-2013. It details the various perceptions of the democratic problem of participation and its causes across time. Deliberative democracy, citizenship, civic education, the public sphere, and

nonprofit organizations come to life within the debates concerning civic engagement and the communicative solutions that occurred during these time periods. Each era had its own new media, which provided future possibilities but were also connected to current participatory issues. In the 1980s, television was seen as replacing facts with entertainment. The 1990s witnessed the growth of politically focused cable and radio programs, which created new political actors—show hosts, partisan commentators and the news corporations themselves. In the 2000s, the internet matured from a novel means of personal interaction to one of the primary communication mediums controlling and shaping information access across the globe. A result of the increasing popularity of cable television, VHS home movies, and eventually internet entertainment, is that the traditional places where people would gather as a public/community fell into decline. Individuals were staying home or only interacting with those with similar interests. Scholars connected technological developments to decreases in community involvement and the democratic participation of citizens overall.

Communication media began losing its independent voices in the 1980s, as large corporate conglomerations bought up and bankrupted local news producers. Citizenship, the public sphere, and civil society as a whole were being redefined. During these decades many scholars perceived declines in traditional democratic institutions (e.g., political parties, community organizations, and social clubs). They were faltering from a lack of involvement, the democratic problem of participation. Consumerism, which contributed to a steep increase in the creation of new media mediums, was seen as one of primary contributors to the country's participatory problem. Globalized capitalism of the

1990s contributed to the commercialization of public spaces and contributed to the societal transformation of democratic citizens into capitalist consumers.

In the 2000s, consumer citizens, through new media, could control what news they saw and limit their interactions to individuals within their social and ideological networks. And civic associations were primarily focused on narrow interests (i.e., Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, National Rifle Association) instead of community-wide issues. This politically-likeminded balkanization of society separated individuals into interest groups and ideological factions. Partisan cable networks (i.e., Fox and MSNBC) and ideologically slanted internet blogs (i.e., Huffington Post and Red State) grew in popularity as people sought out news that matched their political points of view. While partisan news consumption appears to lead to increased political activity, the avoidance of opposing viewpoints strikes a blow to diversity—the heart of a deliberative democracy (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

Finally, the period under investigation (1980-2013) witnessed various versions of civic education centers being conceptualized as solutions to the democratic problem of participation. While new media was seen as a path to greater participation and democratic access across the decades, scholars proposed face-to-face solutions: neighborhood assemblies, civic education classes, local public forums, community service projects, revitalized deliberate spaces, voluntary associations, and private-public civic partnerships (Barber, 1984/1990; Bellah et al., 1985, 1992; McLeod et al., 1999; Putnam & Feldstein, 2004; Bole & Gordon, 2009). New organizations and systems were created to replace or to rejuvenate the traditional institutions that were perceived as being damaged or failing. The national organizations examined in my pilot study are products of these proposed

remedies. The National Issues Forums Institute (est. 1982) focuses on forming dialogue or deliberative public spheres where individuals engage national, regional, and/or local issues. Campus Compact (est. 1985) attempts to teach political and community engagement through university-centered civic education programs. And, the American Democracy Project (est. 2003), through a private-public partnership, trains students and community members how to navigate their local and regional political systems.

Based on my observations and starting with the communication construct of American democracy as a deliberative system of government, I argue that civic education centers that teach the ideals of citizenship are a genre of human discourse that have existed since the founding of the country. The next chapter details the research design and methods used to test the generic conceptualization and to explore United States citizenship and democracy through an examination of the centers, the managers and staff, and the students who participate in their activities.

### Chapter 3: Research Methods and Design

This chapter details my pilot study's research methods and design. In support of my contention that civic education centers represent a genre of human communication, I argue that the establishment of American democracy creates the democratic problem of participation. This problem generates a recurring need to educate individual Americans so they can become actively involved citizens. The civic education centers provide discursive spaces where the ideals of citizenship are taught and in doing so generate a specific genre of human communication. My investigation is directed by the following research questions:

RQ1: Do the centers' rhetoric(s) represent a discourse genre?

RQ1a: What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers' discourses?

RQ2: Do the centers rhetorically constitute active citizens through their discourse?

RQ2a: What is the identity of the 'ideal' citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers?

RQ2b: What is the essence of contemporary citizenship that is experienced by those who use the centers?

RQ3: Are the centers' outcomes matching their rhetorical missions?

RQ3a: Are the students adopting their respective center's language?<sup>1</sup>

My research methods and design provide a means to assess the research questions. I begin my discussion by detailing my pilot study's methods: generic description and a phenomenological investigation with a rhetorical analysis. Then I

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<sup>1</sup> During my data collection, I changed RQ3a from "Which populations or groups are intentionally and/or unintentionally included and excluded from participation in the centers?" My study's focus was adjusted from the community members to the students who participate in the centers' programs. Upon further investigation into the mission, vision, and purpose statements of the centers along with the foundations and organizations they are associated, I found that the focus was on teaching students aspects of citizenship. If I am going to test the experience that the mission, purpose, and vision statements proclaim to provide, then I argue that I need to interview the students.

describe my design and the criteria for selection for the civic education centers and participants who were investigated and interviewed.

### **Research Methods**

The data for my pilot study comes from the Carnegie Foundation, three national organizations (Campus Compact, National Issues Forums Institute, and American Democracy Project), three universities [Michigan State University (MSU), Colorado State University (CSU), and Western Kentucky University (WKU)] and their corresponding civic education centers (WKU Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility & ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships, MSU Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, and CSU Center for Public Deliberation), the centers' managers and staffs (primary participants), and student volunteers (secondary participants). The first level of my investigation (RQ1) analyzed the centers as a discourse genre and utilized the universities' and organizations' mission, purpose, and vision statements along with the questionnaire responses of the centers' managers and staff. The second level of inquiry (RQ2) phenomenologically examined the essence of citizenship through the experiences of the students based on their interviews. The third level of the investigation (RQ3) rhetorically compared the language used by the students to the organizations' mission, vision, and purpose statements and the managers' and staffs' questionnaire responses in order to test the efficacy of the centers and the extent of their rhetorical influence.

### **Generic Description**

I performed what Sonja Foss (2009) classifies as a "generic description" that aims to theoretically define and formulate a genre. For my pilot study, I conceptualize civic

education centers as a discursive genre. A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that, across instances, has a common communicative purpose. I analyzed my conceptualization through three discourse genre tests: a) Situation and Purpose Test, b) Historical Test, and c) Structural Test. Each test's requirements are detailed along with a sample of genre scholars below.

**Situation and purpose test.** The creation of a discourse genre is guided by a set of repetitive conditions that elicit a common communicative reaction. According to Gustainis (1982), a “generalization refers to what happens when rhetors respond to similar rhetorical situations; the expectation is that similar situations give rise to similar kinds of rhetoric” (p. 252). James and Measell (1976) argue that recurring situations create discourses that are constrained by rhetorical forms. A discourse genre is characterized by the circumstances that create it. Rhetorical scholar Carolyn Miller (1984) identifies a genre as a rhetorical action that “acquires meaning from a situation and the social context in which that situation arose” (p. 163).

A discourse genre arises in response to a recurring situation in order to accomplish a specific purpose. Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin (1995), communication and English scholars, explain how a situation and purpose combine to form the primary elements of a genre: “Genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time” (p. 4). The second major aspect of a discourse genre is the existence of a common communicative purpose. Linguist John Swales (1990) adds that a genre's purpose reflects the rationale for its use and creation, “Accordingly, a given communicative purpose triggers a particular genre” (Blitvich,

2010, p. 52). Across instances genres are defined by their shared objectives. Discourse analyst, Vijay Bhatia (2004) contends that a genre is “characterized by a set of communicative purposes” (p. 23).

I examined the civic education centers’ mission, vision, and purpose statements to look for a recurring situation and common communicative purpose. Foss (2009) outlines the analysis process in “four steps: (1) observing similarities in rhetorical response to particular situations; (2) collecting artifacts that occur in similar situations; (3) analyzing the artifacts to discover if they share characteristics; and (4) formulating the organizing principle of the genre” (p. 141). I looked for consistencies in content across the centers’ discourses.

**Historical test.** Discourse genres replicate themselves over time. Russell (1996) explains, “In simplest terms, a genre is a way of speaking or writing that worked once and might work again” (p. 112). Genres are not singular occurrences but the product of multiple instances. “Generic critics assume that regularities in rhetorical life matter. If the same sorts of speeches recur, it is likely because they do something important for the community” (Murphy, 2003, p. 608). Bakhtin (1987) describes genres as repeated utterances that are linked “in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without” (p. 94). They do not exist in isolation but are part of past dialogues. Swales (1990) argues that a genre, as a communication event, comprises “not only the discourse itself and its participants, but also the role of that discourse and the environment of its production and reception, including its historical and cultural associations” (p. 46).

Across time and space, genres take on various formats based on the discursive situations of the moment. Bhatia (2004) defines a genre as a contextual discourse with conventionalized features that are continually adjusting to current circumstances. A static discourse or text that does not adapt to historical and/or environmental influences is not a genre. Berkenkotter and Thein (2005) explain that genres should be looked at “across time and space,” because they “arise in relation to actors’ micro level activities” that include technological tools, cultural practices, and how the discursive “goals have been accomplished in the past” (p. 119). Generic forms may be modified in reaction to a host of factors. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) contend that a genre changes over time in response to the participants’ needs and transformations in community knowledge, “As the intellectual content of a field changes over time, so must the forms used to discuss it; this is why genre knowledge involves both form and content” (p. 25). A genre is not static, but changes its form and content, based on the community knowledge and public practices of different periods.

Organizational communication scholar, Mark Zachry (2000) points out that historical examinations reveal the prior practices from which the contemporary forms of a genre emerged and “how our communicative practices arrived at the point they are today and how they can be remade in the future” (p. 100). A communication genre passes through the past into the present in order to inform the future. In my investigation, I examined the discursive history of the civic education centers and their organizational origins. My goal was to reveal the historical nature of the centers’ rhetoric in relation to its current form.

**Structural test.** A genre's rules are discursive and define its structure. The individuals who use a genre reveal the content of these structures. "Genres are viewed as social institutions, produced and modified by human agents employing the rules of a genre to communicate" (Rutherford, 2005, p. 352). Swales (1990) refers to these rules as constraining conventions that remain consistent across instances. The primary people who employ a genre shape its content structure through their participation. In other words, "organizational genre draws attention to how discourse actually functions in the experience of the individuals who interactively create and interpret it" (Rogers, 2000, p. 430). According to Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), a discourse genre establishes a specific set of rhetorical rules that, when used, further solidifies the genre. "As we draw on genre rules to engage in professional activities, we constitute social structure (in professional, institutional, and organizational contexts) and simultaneously reproduce these structures" (p. 4).

How the individuals who use a genre on a regular basis apply the rhetorical forms is a principal area of investigation. Zachary (2000) contends, "we should examine the social practices through which these forms make sense for people who are negotiating work activities" (p. 100). For this study, I looked at the discourse of the civic education centers' managers and staff. My objective was to discover if there were any similarities and/or consistencies in content across the organizations.

**Theoretical description.** The three tests (situation and purpose, historical, and structural) define the details of a discourse genre. After performing these tests, my study's design turns from conceptualization to the formulation of a theoretical

description. Foss (2009) suggests a series of questions and assessments for determining the validity of a theoretically formulated genre.

Can rules be named with which other critics or observers can concur in identifying characteristics of rhetorical practice when they are confronted with the same examples....A genre establishes bounded options for rhetors in situations, and naming the rules that define those options can help clarify whether a characteristic is part of a genre or not....Are the similarities in substantive and stylistic strategies clearly rooted in the situations in which they were generated....A genre exists only if each element is fused to the other elements so its absence would alter the organizing principle. (pp. 142-3)

If the proposed elements address these questions, then, Foss contends, a researcher has uncovered a genre.

### **Interpretive Phenomenology**

In addition to the discourse genre analysis, my pilot study also includes a phenomenological examination of the civic education centers' student participants that presents another means to better understand democratic citizenship. I explored citizenship as a phenomenon. The United States' form of democracy is a social contract that Americans appear to experience individually and collectively. I contend that a phenomenological analysis of the centers and the people who use them provides a societal snapshot of United States' democracy in action.

In this section, I review the work of a selection of phenomenological theorists, and I describe how I utilized this method in my pilot study. I looked at how citizenship is individually and collectively experienced through civic education centers. My purpose

was to understand the centers' students' "common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). Frederick Wertz (2005), a phenomenological psychologist, describes the process as revealing "phenomena as they are lived" (p. 168). I interviewed the civic education center students to uncover their lived experiences.

One of my goals was to seek out the essence of American citizenship by uncovering whether or not "all the [individual] experiences have an underlying structure" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Edmund Husserl (1907/1964), principle founder of the Twentieth Century School of Phenomenology, in his series of lectures on the *Idea of Phenomenology*, describes "phenomenology as the general doctrine of essences" (p. 3). The essence of a phenomenon is "that which appears" (p. 11) through an examination of individual and/or collective experiences. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/1974), "phenomenology is the study of essence; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences" (p. vii). The question for my investigation is how to define essence.

One way of defining essence is the combination of perceptions from a variety of people who have experienced a similar phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty (1962/1974) explains,

to seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth (p. xvi)...The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. (p. xx)

German continental philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960/2004) identifies these “gears” where people’s perceptions intersect, as hermeneutical “horizons,” that come together in the form of shared understandings. The essence of a phenomenon could be interpreted as the shared understanding of an experience. I explored the students’ individual experiences at the civic education centers in order to find common themes across the centers.

Interviews, observations, and texts were collected as data and dissected to discover significant statements and/or to uncover meaningful clusters of themes. Shaun Gallagher, Lillian and Morrie Moss (2012) Professor of Excellence in Philosophy at the University of Memphis, suggests that the experience of a phenomenon should be explored from a multitude of perspectives. A phenomenon is revealed through how it is perceived by the various individuals who experience and live it. Phenomenologist Aron Gurwitsch (1965/2009) further describes the phenomenology of perception as an examination of a variety of points of view:

In perceiving the building from a certain standpoint, we do not perceive a side or aspect of the building, but, on the contrary, we perceive the building itself, and as such, appearing from a certain side and under a certain aspect. In other words, it is the noematic system as a whole that presents itself from the vantage point of one of its members. If we walk around the building to perceive it from different points of view, we are conscious of the identity of the building as appearing in varying manners of adumbrational presentation. (p. 405)

The objective is to describe the essence of a particular subject as experienced by a group of people. I surveyed the centers’ managers and staff and interviewed the student

volunteers in order to obtain a variety of perspectives. Tuohy and her co-researchers (Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, and Sixmith, 2013) refer to interpretive phenomenology as a hermeneutical exploration of people's realities. Hermeneutical interpretation, they claim, "aims to understand and interpret participant's experiences to determine the meaning of experience" (p. 20).

A phenomenological analysis might reveal voices that are 1) typically excluded and/or 2) the experiences of marginalized groups (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, women, and/or undocumented immigrants/individuals seeking citizenship). Thomas Groenewald (2004) explains, "the unique or minority voices are important counterpoints" (p. 51). In order to paint a fuller picture of the essence of a phenomenon, an inquirer should seek out the existence of various viewpoints and those individual experiences that might not be represented within the dominant perspective. The phenomenological approach "constitutes a determined attempt to enrich the world of our experience by bringing out hitherto neglected aspects of this experience" (Speigelberg, 1965, p. 700).

Researchers examine and discuss democracy and citizenship theoretically and through the lens of scholarly literature, but how are these ideas actually experienced by individuals? According to Wertz (2005), phenomenology humanizes concepts, introducing people's perceptions into the equation. My pilot study's objective is to take a step beyond a discourse analysis of the centers' mission and purpose statements (i.e., genre analysis) in order to gain a glimpse into what it means to live as an active democratic citizen. The rhetoric of United States citizenship might not represent the reality of the people's experiences of it.

## **Rhetorical Analysis**

I rhetorically analyzed my phenomenological results in order to discover if the civic education centers' discourse influenced the students. According to Edwin Black (1970), "in all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something but to be something" (p. 95). I compared the centers' and students' discourses to discover whom the centers ask the students to be.

I explored the space where the students' experiences and centers' discourses come together. Edwin Black (1970) argues that ideologies establish unique vocabularies that can influence the actions and beliefs of the people who adopt the terms of a discourse's ideology, which he calls verbal tokens. He claims these tokens can be traced across discourses in order to reveal how one discourse influences another (Black, 1970):

The expectation that a verbal token of ideology can be taken as implying an auditor who shares that ideology is something more than a hypothesis about a relationship. It rather should be viewed as expressing a vector of influence....Actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world. (p. 90)

Black's concept starts with an individual (the auditor) attending to a discourse, listening to a speech, reading a book, or in our case participating in a civic education center's activity or curriculum. A discourse offers a way of viewing the world and uses an ideological vocabulary to express this vision. If an individual attending a discourse adapts a verbal token from the discourse's vocabulary, then Black contends the individual also adopts the discourse's worldview. He argues that the discourse has rhetorically influenced that individual.

I traced the rhetorical chain of the civic education centers' discourses across the organizations to the managers and staff. I looked to see if the student participants adopted the centers' language and evaluated the efficacy of the organizations' missions. In the next section, the research design describes the steps that were taken in order to capture this picture.

### **Research Design**

My pilot study contains three primary components—discursive genre description and a qualitative phenomenological investigation with a rhetorical analysis. The genre description focused on the discourse of the centers (i.e., mission statements, press releases and other public pronouncements, instructional/education program descriptions, published works, online presence, and academic research on these centers) and the discourse of the primary participants (staff and management). The phenomenological inquiry into citizenship qualitatively obtained the experiences of the secondary participants, the students who attend or take part in the centers' activities. A last level examined the rhetorical horizon where the experiences of the students' and centers' discourses come together. Next, I review the process for selecting the civic education centers and describe the recruitment of volunteers.

### **Civic Education Centers**

Genres can be actualized in the form of organizations such as voluntary associations, for profit companies, and/or not for profit foundations. Ethno-linguists Ron Scollon and Suzanne Scollon (2001) identified genres as “discourse systems, usually institutional structures which [*sic*] have been formed for specific purposes, such as corporations or governments” (p. 178). While they may develop from common recurring

situations and seek similar communicative purposes, a genre can take on a variety of formats. I examined civic education centers as a genre of human discourse.

I focused on three national organizations: the National Issues Forums Institute, Campus Compact, and America Democracy Project. In a Kettering Foundation Report, Martin Carcasson traced the contemporary expansion of civic education centers (2008) and outlined the growth of local centers associated with the national organizations by observing:

In 1999, over 300 college and university presidents signed the President's Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education (p. 6)...At the time of this writing, 265 more presidents have added their signature, and Campus Compact currently boasts a coalition of nearly 1,200 college and university presidents representing some 6 million students (p. 7)...Currently 48 centers or institutes are listed on the NIF [National Issues Forum Institute] website, covering 36 states and Canada. (p. 12)

Representing an expanding education movement, 41 of the 48 National Issues Forums Institute<sup>2</sup> centers are connected to community colleges and/or universities. The national organizations have lists of the associations and centers connected to them on their websites. The centers housed within higher-education institutions were catalogued, and one university-based association from each of the three national organizations was chosen, for a total of 3 centers: Western Kentucky University's Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (ICSR) and ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships, Michigan State University's Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, and

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<sup>2</sup> In evaluating the organizations connected to the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), Mathews (2010) "learned that the centers are evolving, and their number seems to be growing. Initially, there were 20, then 40, and now more than 50" (p. 1).

Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation.<sup>3</sup> Each University selected had received the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.<sup>4</sup> When possible, preliminary site visits were done to ensure that the organizations to be studied were actually functioning.<sup>5</sup>

## **Participants**

This investigation sought out primary and secondary participants, both over 18 years of age. The primary participants are the civic education centers' managers and staff. Primary participants were recruited during the initial contact and given the questionnaire with a one-week deadline with follow-up emails for those who did not respond. The secondary participants are those students who participate in the centers' activities (i.e., volunteer projects, deliberation/dialogue forums, or advocacy training programs). In order to gain access to the students, the centers' management were contacted via email, telephone, and/or an on-site visit, and asked if their centers were willing to participate in the study. A summary of the research project was described to the primary manager (Appendix A) and access to secondary participants was requested.<sup>6</sup> The recruitment of secondary volunteers depended on the structure of the centers' and students' organizational roles. When possible, student volunteers were recruited prior to the onsite

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<sup>3</sup> Associated with a communication department.

<sup>4</sup> The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is a new voluntary grouping "designed to work based on documentation provided by the institutions" (Driscoll, January/February 2008, p. 39). The civic engagement process is a change from Carnegie's other classifications, which are based on "data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and the College Board" (McCormick & Zhao, September/October 2005, p. 55). The universities answer a set of questions and self-assessments about their "Institutional Identity and Culture", "Institutional Commitment," "Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnerships" (Zuichesand, 2008, p. 42) and apply for the classification.

<sup>5</sup> Ephemeral (i.e., brochures & pamphlets) and electronic (i.e., websites & online newsletters) discourse from the centers and supporting organizations were collected.

<sup>6</sup> Access to both primary and secondary participants was a required component for selection.

visit.<sup>7</sup> However, I was not able to enlist all of the secondary participants for each center in advance. When that situation occurred, I used a snowball effect to get referrals from the initial interviewees.

Boyd (2001) defines the sample size range for a phenomenological study: “participant selection to achieve redundancy in or saturation of the data. From two to ten participants are usually sufficient” (p. 109). As a pilot study, questionnaires were given to a minimum of three primary participants and at least three secondary participants from each of the three centers were interviewed for a total of 19 participants.<sup>8</sup> The aim of the interview questions was to bring the experiences of the centers’ secondary participants to the surface (Appendix B). For the genre analysis, the goal was to get at least three primary participants from each of the three case study centers to fill out a questionnaire (Appendix C). The purpose of the questionnaire was to uncover the democratic discourse of the centers as perceived by the primary participants.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss my research methods and design. My pilot study explores three types of civic education centers (deliberation/dialogue forums, volunteerism/civic learning and advocacy training) and their various civic missions in terms of communication. I tested whether the rhetoric of these centers constitutes a genre of human communication that expresses democratic voices. The research method used was a genre analysis, which defines a discourse genre as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that, across instances, has a common communicative purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> I traveled to Colorado State University (CSU), Michigan State University (MSU), and Western Kentucky University (WKU).

<sup>8</sup> Each volunteer was given a consent form describing the research project, which was explained by the investigator (Appendix D).

Additionally, the experiences of the centers' participants were examined in order to explore the essence of United States' (American) citizenship. I interviewed the students and performed a phenomenological inquiry. Finally, the rhetorical chain was traced from the national organizations' mission, purpose, and vision statements through the university-based centers to the language used by the students. Sharer (2003) asserts that genres make and shape meaning for people and communities, and Richardson (2000) adds, "genres draw upon the conventions, associations, and understandings that permeate our culture" (p. 614). Exploring how individuals are taught to be and actually perform the ideal citizen could help us better understand how the United States' form of democracy actually functions.

Identifying civic education centers' discourse as a genre could help determine a practical framework from which to teach and/or communicate United States democracy and American citizenship. Genres spotlight a society's rhetorical response to a recurring situation over time and space. If the centers represent a genre, then a generic description might open a window of analysis that connects individual rhetorical reactions to a wider cultural context. However, even if civic education centers do not constitute a discursive genre, they provide a scholarly space within which to discuss the United States' form of democracy. Therefore, whether or not the organizations can be studied as a generic description, a rhetorical investigation into the centers' discourse provides insight into the literature concerning American associations, and contributes to an understanding of contemporary constructions of the ideal citizen. The next chapter presents the genre analysis, which traces the civic education centers from their origins. Then, in chapter

five, the student experiences of the centers are phenomenologically investigated to uncover the essence of American citizenship.

## Chapter 4: Discourse Genre Findings

In this chapter, I am going to argue that civic education centers represent a genre of human discourse. A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that, across instances, has a common communicative purpose. The civic education center genre is characterized as (1) a rhetorical response to America's democratic problem of participation and (2) communicating the common purpose of teaching citizenship. Across the centers' discourses, I identify four primary elements and shared themes: (a) civic education, (b) citizenship, (c) active citizen, and (d) community.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter answers the first research questions: Do the centers' rhetoric(s) represent a discourse genre (RQ1)? What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers' discourses (RQ1a)? I used the discourse genre tests (historical, situation, purpose, and structural) described in the methods chapter to discover the rhetorical similarities and consistencies across the organizations. The objective of my pilot study is to broaden the research on civic education centers beyond individualized self-studies and unrelated case studies in order to look at them as a comprehensive whole. First, I reveal evidence that the national organizations (Campus Compact, American Democracy Project, and National Issues Forums Institute) were formed in response to the democratic problem of participation (America's recurring situation) and identify teaching citizenship as their common purpose. Second, I uncover the primary elements and shared themes that make up the genre's content structure (See Figure 3). I address each factor individually through a textual analysis of the organizations' and centers' mission, vision, and purpose statements, along with the managers' and staffs' questionnaire responses. These elements and themes provide answers to two other research questions. Do the centers rhetorically

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<sup>1</sup> These factors are not an exhaustive list, but provide an initial foundation for understanding the genre.

constitute active citizens through their discourse (RQ2)? What is the identity of the ‘ideal’ citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers (RQ2a)?

**RQ1: Defining the Civic Education Center Genre**

- (1) Rhetorical Response to the Democratic Problem of Participation
- (2) Communicates the Common Purpose of Teaching Citizenship

**RQ1a: Observed Primary Elements and Shared Themes**

- a. Civic Education
- b. Citizenship
- c. Active Citizen
- d. Community

*Figure 3. Civic Education Center Genre*

### **Defining the Civic Education Center Genre**

As a result of my analysis, I found evidence that the civic education center genre arose as (1) a rhetorical response to the democratic problem of participation, a recurring situation throughout the history of the United States. Self-governance, which requires participation and is American democracy’s greatest strength, can also be the system’s biggest vulnerability. If the people do not participate in the political system, then the United States stops being a democracy. I also found that the civic education center genre (2) communicates the common purpose of teaching citizenship. While each organization has a different approach to civic education (volunteer/service learning, deliberation/dialogue forums, and advocacy training), they share the goal of training individuals to be civically engaged citizens.

I arrived at these preliminary findings by examining the ephemeral and academic literature, and published mission, purpose, and vision statements from three national organizations: Campus Compact (volunteer/service learning), the American Democracy

Project (advocacy training), and the National Issues Forums Institute (deliberation/dialogue forums). In this section, I present the rhetorical evidence from each individual organization and then summarize my findings emphasizing, *in italics*, the words and phrases that connect the organizations' discourse to the civic education center genre's recurring situation and common purpose.

### **Campus Compact**

“Campus Compact is a national coalition of nearly 1,100 colleges and universities committed to the public purpose of Higher Education” (Who We Are, 2016). Campus Compact's founding university presidents<sup>2</sup> identified a participatory problem in the American democratic system. They saw a lack of community service as a crucial civic concern. According to the organization's account of their history, “In the mid-1980s...they [the organization's founders] noted many students on their campuses who were involved in *community service* [emphasis added] and believed many others would follow suit with the *proper encouragement and supportive structures* [emphasis added]” (Mission & Vision, 2016). The founders argued if people were encouraged to volunteer in their communities, then America's civic involvement issues might be solved. Their solution was to create Campus Compact, an entity that provides resources for the development of higher education centers<sup>3</sup> and programs that teach citizenship skills through service learning and volunteer projects.

Campus Compact's discourse describes the democratic problem of participation in terms of civic and political disengagement. The president of each participating

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<sup>2</sup> “75 university presidents spoke at the 1985 launch and within ten years they had over 500 members” (Campus Compact, 1995, p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> According to Campus Compact (2013), “nearly all members—96%—have at least one center devoted to community and civic engagement, and more than 60% have more than one center” (p. 7).

institution is required to sign the *President's Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education* (1999), which states

There is growing evidence of *disengagement of many Americans from the communal life* [emphasis added] of our society in general, and from the *responsibilities of democracy* [emphasis added] in particular. We share a special concern about the *disengagement of college students from democratic participation* [emphasis added].

Campus Compact and the nearly 1,100 university presidents who have signed the document declare that democratic disengagement is an alarming dilemma amongst college students and the American population in general. They allege that the United States form of democracy, which depends on citizen involvement, is in trouble.

Campus Compact's rhetorical response to the issue of citizens disengaging from the political system is to concentrate on teaching civic engagement. The organization equates community service to citizenship, a skill that people must learn to do and teachers must learn to teach. Campus Compact calls for university "offices and staff to coordinate *community engagement efforts* [emphasis added], training to help faculty members integrate *community work* [emphasis added] into their teaching and research, scholarships, and other student incentives, and the institutional will to make *civic and community engagement* [emphasis added] a priority" (History, 2015). The organization's goal is to make community and civic service a significant part of the country's higher education curriculum.

I contend the above examples provide evidence that Campus Compact's rhetoric reflects the civic education center genre's two primary components (democratic problem

of participation and teaching citizenship). The founding history reveals that the organization was created as a response to a perceived problem of people disengaging from political participation. Campus Compact's discursive solution to these democratic issues is to encourage higher education institutions to teach community-based citizenship skills.

### **American Democracy Project**

“The American Democracy Project (ADP) is a network of more than 250 state colleges and universities focused on public higher education’s role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens for our democracy” (American Democracy Project, n.d.). According to George Mehaffy (September/October 2005), one of the project founders, the American Democracy Project began in 2002 with a conversation concerning three troubling trends: “a rising level of bitter partisanship in national politics, college students’ growing *disenchantment with political and civic life* [emphasis added], and public colleges’ and universities’ *loss of a sense of public purpose* [emphasis added]” (p. 68). The founders argue these trends were causing a deterioration in citizen engagement, the heart of United States democracy. They designed an organization to deal with what they perceived to be the roots of America’s participatory problems (i.e., disenchantment, lack of knowledge, and alienation).

The American Democracy Project seeks to tackle political involvement issues at the institutional level where the founders claim higher education has lost its “public purpose.” The organization adopts a top down approach. The project asks the presidents and chancellors of colleges to endorse a document they created called *The Democracy*

*Commitment* (2011) that rhetorically frames America's democratic problem of participation in terms of civic education and political engagement.

Many of our citizens *lack basic knowledge* [emphasis added] of the civic and democratic institutions through which democratic power is exercised. *Too few vote* [emphasis added]; too many are *alienated from a process* [emphasis added] they believe irrelevant; too many are *doubtful about their ability* to change the circumstances of their lives.

The American Democracy Project's commitment portrays the United States system as being in a critical situation that needs attention. The project maintains that a lack of civic knowledge might not only result in citizens dropping out of the political process, but also in citizens losing hope in their ability to make a difference.

The American Democracy Project seeks to reverse these troubling trends in democratic participation by increasing people's political efficacy, an individual's belief that he or she is a valuable and useful part of a political system. The organization trains participants how to be responsible members of society through programs that prepare "students for their *roles as citizens and engaged members of their communities* [emphasis added]" (The Democracy Commitment, 2011). The project promotes an active version of citizenship.

I assert that these textual samples demonstrate that the American Democracy Project's discourse addresses the democratic problem of participation and forwards the civic education center genre's common purpose of teaching citizenship. The project's rhetoric paints a picture of a county that is in trouble because of a lack of civic literacy

and citizen engagement. The organization confronts these participatory problems by preparing students to be informed and engaged citizens.

### **National Issues Forums Institute**

“National Issues Forums (NIF) is a network of civic, educational, and other organizations, and individuals, whose common interest is to promote public deliberation in America” (National Issues Forums, 2014). David Matthews (1985), a founder of the National Issues Forums Institute,<sup>4</sup> explains that the organization formed in response to “a deep concern with the fragmentation of the country into special interest groups, with *the estrangement citizens felt* [emphasis added] from their government, and with *the lack of cohesiveness at all levels* [emphasis added] in America” (p. 75). The founders claim that these and other democratic deficiencies were causing declines in political participation.

The organization took

shape in 1981 amid concern about *the low level of civic literacy* [emphasis added] among Americans. Not only did the average person *lack an understanding of the issues* [emphasis added] that our elected leaders were struggling with, we had *little opportunity to express* [emphasis added] our informed opinions to those in influence. (Welcome To, 2014)

Citizen engagement is a democracy’s lifeblood that allows for the formation of ideas amongst groups and individuals and the movement of those opinions between constituents and their representatives. The National Issues Forums Institute was established to provide a place where people can develop political beliefs and learn how to articulate them. The organization frames citizenship as a form of political communication.

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<sup>4</sup> “The new program was a success, and in 1989 became the National Issues Forums Institute” (Welcome To, 2014).

The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) highlights the importance of solving the democratic problem of participation. “The health of the nation’s democratic enterprise depends on the *energetic participation of responsible citizens* [emphasis added]” (An Overview, 2014). A democracy cannot survive without the involvement of the people. The institute’s diagnosis is that the United States democratic system is sick and they contend that teaching deliberative democracy will bring the system back to life. The organization constructs civic education spaces “where *democracy comes alive* [emphasis added]. It’s where *the practice of public deliberation* [emphasis added] is learned by doing” (National Issues Forums, 2014). The National Issues Forums Institute portrays democratic citizenship as a learned discursive practice that must be taught. People need to be shown how to be participatory citizens who communicate with others.

I argue that the National Issues Forums Institute’s discourse responds to the democratic problem of participation and expresses the civic education center genre’s common purpose of teaching citizenship. The institute depicts feelings of estrangement, reduced civic literacy rates, and insufficient knowledge about political issues as contributing factors that lead to low levels of citizen participation. The organization’s literature frames civic engagement as a crucial component of American democracy. The National Issues Forums Institute’s solution to America’s participatory problems is to teach people to be politically engaged citizens through public deliberation training.

### **Discourse Genre Summary**

A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that, across instances, has a common communicative purpose. The civic education center genre is characterized as (1) a rhetorical response to America’s democratic problem of

participation and (2) communicating the common purpose of teaching citizenship. I examined Campus Compact, the American Democracy Project, and the National Issues Forums Institute and identified discursive evidence that each describes a similar recurring situation (democratic problem of participation), and communicates the civic education center's genre's common purpose (teaching citizenship).

(1) Across the national organizations, I found a shared concern for the troublesome state of American democracy. Their discourses describe variations of the democratic problem of participation such as, a perceived loss or decline in community service, civic engagement, and/or political involvement. The organizations appear to have been created in reaction to, and formed around, their rhetorical responses to these problems.

(2) The United States system of democracy depends on the participation of citizens; however, active citizenship does not seem to be a natural state of being. Individuals have to learn political, civic, and community engagement skills. The national organizations each developed different definitions of citizenship: community volunteer (Campus Compact), political advocate (American Democracy Project), and public deliberator (National Issues Forums Institute). While their approaches to citizenship vary, their discourses share the common goal of teaching people to be active citizens.

In answering RQ1, I discovered that a common thread woven into the national organizations' discourses was an engagement-focused definition of citizenship. The definition of engagement, however, fluctuated; it was not a constant. How an organization rhetorically frames the democratic problem of participation appears to influence their definition of engagement, which shapes their solution to the problem.

For example, Campus Compact views citizenship in terms of community service. Their response is to create volunteer and service learning programs. The American Democracy Project sees a political process that needs engaged community members. The project focuses on advocacy-based training programs. The National Issues Forums Institute understands participation through the lenses of civic communication and political expression. The institute arranges local deliberation and dialog forums.

The national organizations develop citizenship discourses based on their perceptions of democratic issues and participatory problems—what they see as being wrong with the country. The organizations’ various takes on the concept of the active citizen demonstrates the contested nature of American citizenship. The civic education center genre seems to provide a discursive space not only where a range of ideas about what constitutes citizenship can be negotiated and advanced, but also where democracy itself is rhetorically constructed. People develop and promote their ideas and beliefs of what the United States form of democracy should be. How a group or an individual defines the active citizen reflects his or her worldview and ideology.

Campus Compact, the American Democracy Project, and the National Issues Forums Institute spread the civic education genre down the hierarchal chain to nearly 1,500 universities and centers,<sup>5</sup> where the centers’ managers and staff solidify the genre’s structure. These primary participants, who use the genre on a regular basis, articulate the compositional components of the genre’s discourse. In the next section, I examine the civic education centers’ hierarchal chain in order to answer RQ1a: What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers’ discourses?

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<sup>5</sup> Campus Compact is on nearly 1,100 universities, the American Democracy Project works with more than 250 colleges and universities, and the National Issues Forums Institute lists 113 partner networks.

## Observed Primary Elements and Shared Themes

The content of a genre's structure is defined by its primary elements and shared themes. In order to discover these components, I looked for rhetorical constancies and similarities across the civic education centers' hierarchal chain from the Carnegie Foundation and national organizations (Campus Compact, American Democracy Project, and National Issues Forums Institute) to the universities (Michigan State University, Western Kentucky University, and Colorado State University) and centers to the managers and staff. I identified four major topic areas: (a) civic education, (b) citizenship, (c) active citizen, and (d) community. These factors are not an exhaustive list, but provide an initial foundation for understanding the genre. I describe each theme and element individually and briefly explain its, his, or her function and placement within the civic education center genre's discourse.

### Civic Education

Civic education is a crucial component of the genre. This primary element appears in the mission, vision, and purpose statements of the national organizations, universities, and centers. These discourses communicate the genre's purpose of teaching citizenship through explicit and implicit civic education examples.

The explicit references use educational terminology such as, *teach* democratic skills, *educate* citizens, or offer *learning* opportunities. For example, one of the three mission goals of Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation is to "improve *Civic Pedagogy* [emphasis added]: Study and improve methods of developing citizenship skills at all levels (K-12, higher education, *citizen education* [emphasis added])" (About Us, 2017). The Colorado center explicitly expresses the genre's purpose

(i.e., civic pedagogy and citizen education). The implied instances do not specifically state the genre's civic education objectives, but they articulate the spirit of the genre's purpose of teaching citizenship. These discourses include phrases such as, *practicing* citizenship values, *providing* practical experiences, *promoting* civic virtues, *developing and preparing* individuals to be responsible citizens, or *transforming* "students to transform the world" (SLiCE, 2017).

A civic education center genre cannot exist without civic education. The national organizations, universities, and centers enter the genre's language through the purpose of teaching citizenship. Their discourses either explicitly or implicitly convey their civic education goals.

### **Citizenship**

Citizenship is another major element within the civic education center genre. The national organizations and universities focus on educating individuals to be engaged citizens. I found that each of the centers' discourses and their managers' and staff's questionnaire answers also express the genre's purpose of teaching citizenship. The managers and staff who use the genre on a regular basis articulate a variety of definitions of civic engagement. Citizenship is not portrayed as a status or classification but as an action that is performed.

Here are some examples of how the managers and staff describe the types of civic education promoted by their centers. CSU-13<sup>6</sup> says the Colorado State University center teaches students to be active citizens who choose "to be aware and choosing to participate

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<sup>6</sup> In order to protect the identity of the students and the managers and staff, I assigned them a number along with the abbreviation for their university: Colorado State University (CSU); Michigan State University (MSU); Western Kentucky University (WKU).

in one's community, which can be locally, nationally, or globally.”<sup>7</sup> WKU-9 claims the Western Kentucky University center advances an expanded version of citizenship that stresses, “being involved in your neighborhood, community, state, nation at a deeper level than voting or simply obeying law” (WKU-9). The Michigan State University program promotes a similar concept of the active citizen whose “participation that goes beyond voting and becomes activism, engagement” (MSU-5). The managers and staff describe a civically engaged citizen whose involvement exceeds basic democratic duties (i.e., voting and obeying laws). The managers' and staff's questionnaire answers reveal the nature of citizenship that the centers promote.

Within the civic education center genre, citizenship is an action that individuals are taught to do. The Western Kentucky University center expresses this definition within the goals that they have for their students: “learn about and practice the virtues of citizenship” (Our Mission and History, 2016). It is a form of participation or a role that people learn to practice. WKU-10 contends, “the center maintains a commitment to active citizenship.” The civic education center genre discursively constructs citizenship as a democratic skillset and asks participants to become actively involved citizens.<sup>8</sup>

### **Active Citizen**

I examined the civic education center's hierarchal chain from the national organizations, to the universities, to the centers, and found rhetorical similarities and consistencies in their mission, vision, and purpose statements. Their discourses appear to

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<sup>7</sup> I recorded the student interviews and sent the audio files to a transcription service. The students' responses and managers' and staff's questionnaire answers are presented in their original format with their syntax and grammatical errors. Assume that all research participant citations include a *[sic]*.

<sup>8</sup> According to Black (1970), “in all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something but to be something” (p. 95).

share the goal of teaching people to be politically and civically engaged. The following examples illustrate the variety of ways civic education organizations discursively define active citizens.

The Carnegie Foundation encourages universities to develop “*educated, engaged citizens* [emphasis added]” (Carnegie Classification, 2016). Campus Compact’s mission aims at training “the next generation of citizens to be *active and responsible participants* [emphasis added] in our democracy” (Mission & Vision, 2016). The American Democracy Project reflects the same language focusing on “the next generation of *informed, engaged citizens* [emphasis added] for our democracy....*active, involved citizens* [emphasis added]” (American Democracy Project, n.d.). The universities share consistencies in their verbiage. Western Kentucky University prepares students to be “*socially responsible citizen-leaders* [emphasis added] of a global society” (About WKU, 2016) and Michigan State University concentrates on creating “*globally engaged citizen leaders* [emphasis added]” (MSU Mission Statement, 2008). The centers also have similar expressions of civic involvement. The Western Kentucky center encourages their secondary participants to act “as *public problem-solvers and effective community-builders* [emphasis added]” (ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships, 2014) and the Colorado Center imagines “a role for citizens as *active and engaged problem-solvers* [emphasis added]” (Carcasson & Sprain, 2010, n.p).

All three organizations discursively constructs a version of the active citizen. They ask people to adopt a set of characteristics (i.e., engaged, problem-solver, leader) that make up their rhetorical vision of the ideal American citizen. The civic education

organizations advance the genre's purpose of teaching citizenship through the objective of producing civically engaged citizens.

## **Community**

I examined the discourses of the national organizations, universities, centers, and the managers and staff and found that civic education occurs in and within a variety of communities. The expression (community) is employed to describe types of communities, various individuals, educational goals, issues, actions, services, and targeted outcomes. I highlight the various forms that the term takes across the discourses.

Community is portrayed as an ideal, “the” or “a” community, and as encompassing various spheres (i.e., local, area, university, neighborhood, state, nation, or international). Communities are personalized (i.e., your, one's, their); they create types of connections, or have roots. Community defines groups of individuals, partnerships, members, and agencies. In terms of education, community conceptualizes forms of scholarship and research and represents groups of students, faculty, and university staff who are focused on community issues, gaps, engagement, connections, and/or culture. Community is a place where participatory opportunities for civic duties such as development, strengthening, benefiting, or building community take place. According to the managers and staff, the centers seek to: “create a stronger community” (WKU-10), “bettering their World” (CSU-12), “move toward a more just society” (CSU-11), and “serve the entire university community” (MSU-9). Community is something to be considered, prioritized, or provided a service to.

The organizations' focus on community forefronts the civic aspects of the genre. The discourses encompass the entirety of community from the individual, to local society,

to the world. The term rhetorically defines the who and the where of civic education. Next, I summarize the genre content findings from my observation of the primary elements and shared themes across the organizations.

### **Genre Content Summary**

In sum, my analysis revealed similarities and consistencies across the organizations' mission, vision, and purpose statements and the center's managers' and staff's questionnaire answers, which provide a broad description of the content of the civic education center genre. I discovered four main topics that make up the structure of the content: (a) civic education, (b) citizenship, (c) active citizen, and (d) community. I found that the discourses express the genre's common purpose of teaching citizenship by utilizing these key themes.

First and foremost, the organizations communicate an implicit or explicit civic educational goal. While their definitions of what they mean by civic education (service learning / volunteerism, advocacy training, or democratic dialogs /deliberation) may differ, their missions and visions share the purpose of teaching citizenship. Citizenship is not characterized as a classification or a status, but as an action that an individual does. I found that the activities performed by engaged citizens can take place in a multitude of communities. These aspects of community engagement embody the civic component of the civic education center genre.

The theme that I titled "active citizen" provides the answers for two research questions: Do the centers rhetorically constitute active citizens through their discourse (RQ2)? What is the identity of the 'ideal' citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers (RQ2a)? From the evidence I collected, it appears that the centers do

rhetorically construct an active citizen. The citizen is described by the organizations using a variety of adjectives such as engaged, informed, responsible, educated, problem-solver, and/or leader. Teaching or training people to be engaged citizens is a common goal across their discourses. The identity of the citizen revolves around an individual who participates in a version of community with the goal of improving the society and world around them.

### **Conclusion**

The shared themes and primary elements I discovered appear to satisfy Foss's formulation and assessments for uncovering a genre. According to Foss (2009), a genre has a set of rhetorical rules that are bound by and rooted in a situation. A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation that, across instances, has a common communicative purpose. I found that the civic education center genre formed as a response to (1) America's recurring situation, the democratic problem of participation. The genre (2) communicates the common purpose of teaching citizenship. My pilot study discovered four main content themes that were consistent across the organizations and the centers' managers' and staff's discourses: (a) civic education, (b) citizenship, (c) active citizen, and (d) community.<sup>9</sup>

The primary elements and themes I discovered establish the rhetorical rules for the civic education center genre. The genre's discourses either explicitly or implicitly expresses their civic education goals; they frame citizenship in terms of political participation and/or civic engagement; they ask participants to adopt an ideal version of the active citizen, and the civic engagement components happen to and within

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<sup>9</sup> These factors are not an exhaustive list, but provide an initial foundation for understanding the genre.

communities. I argue that these content themes make up the civic education center genre's basic structure.

In this chapter, I was able to answer four research questions. Do the centers' rhetoric(s) represent a discourse genre (RQ1)? What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers' discourses (RQ1a)? Do the centers rhetorically constitute active citizens through their discourse (RQ2)? What is the identity of the 'ideal' citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers (RQ2a)? The next chapter reviews my phenomenological findings, which reveal the lived experiences of the student participants.

## **Chapter 5: Phenomenological and Rhetorical Findings**

The objective of this chapter is to take a step beyond the discourse analysis in order to gain a glimpse into the student volunteers' (secondary participants) experiences of the civic education centers. I performed a phenomenological inquiry aimed at bringing the lived experiences of the secondary participants to the surface through a series of interview questions. I used the students' interview responses to answer the final three research questions. What is the essence of contemporary citizenship that is experienced by those who use the centers (RQ2b)? Are the centers' outcomes matching their rhetorical missions (RQ3)? Are the students adopting their respective center's language (RQ3a)?

The first section addresses RQ2b and examines the essence of contemporary citizenship experienced by the student volunteers. I interviewed the secondary participants asking them what citizen values they learned from the centers. My pilot study found four common themes across the student interview responses: (1) Giving back, (2) Community engagement, (3) Making a difference, (4) and Gaining an awareness of others.

The second section answers RQ3 & RQ3a by comparing the student experiences to the organizations' mission, vision, and purpose statements and the managers' and staff's (primary participants) questionnaire responses. I rhetorically examined the primary participant responses and they appear to believe that their centers are accomplishing their missions and goals. Evidence shows that the students adopted their centers' language when describing their experiences. The secondary and primary participants both expressed the civic education genre's discursive structure.

## The Essence of Contemporary Citizenship

The discourse analysis revealed that the civic education centers share the common purpose of teaching citizenship. I found that the student volunteers (secondary participants) were the focus of the centers' purpose. I argue that the essence of contemporary citizenship that is promoted by the civic education centers can be revealed through an examination of the secondary participants' experiences. I conducted interviews with a self-selected sample of ten students from each of the three centers (4 CSU, 3 MSU, & 3 WKU)<sup>1</sup> who volunteered to participate in the study. The students were asked open-ended questions with follow-up questions about their individual experiences at their respective university's civic education center. In analyzing the secondary participants' interview responses, four major themes emerged: (1) Giving back, (2) Community engagement, (3) Making a difference, (4) and Gaining an awareness of others.

### Giving Back

In their interview responses, the student volunteers describe the phenomenon of citizenship in terms of giving back to either individuals or to a version of community. When asked what value, as a citizen, MSU-3 has received from participating in the Michigan State University program, he responded, "I think I feel better about myself in terms of being able to *give back*....even though I'm studying Accounting; I can also participate in the community and help people out." He defines citizenship in terms of community participation and working with others. MSU-3 recounts one of his favorite moments working at the center helping people with their tax returns.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the identity of the students and the managers and staff, I assigned them a number along with the abbreviation for their university: Colorado State University (CSU); Michigan State University (MSU); Western Kentucky University (WKU).

This woman came in, she had two kids, single mom. I think she had to pay the previous year and she went to H&R Block, they charged her and she had to pay. This year she got a pretty big refund and she was just ecstatic and got on the phone with her Mom. I think that's the biggest part that I like to see that we can *give to the community*.

Interactions with the public appear to provide an educational path—interactions that offer the secondary participants a chance to engage others through the act of giving back. Society is seen as benefitting from individual level contributions.

MSU-2 also describes her experiences at Michigan State University in terms of giving back. “It helps me extend my knowledge so I can do my own taxes and it helps me *give back* to the community I'm in.” Civic involvement becomes a type of applied knowledge that can be taught with citizenship being the set of values that the secondary participants learn. Giving back encompasses those engagement experiences where the students work with individuals and/or groups to solve local problems. These civic activities attract and draw people to the centers. Individuals appear to seek out organizations that give back. WKU-1 says that she chose to join the Western Kentucky University center because, “it actually *gives back* to the community. They're not an organization that just comes and go. They actually help build stability and unity within a community.” Sustainable community programs that continuously give back are seen as being more valuable than one-time service projects.

### **Community Engagement**

Civic education centers connect participants to local groups, surrounding neighborhoods, city and regional municipalities. Opportunities to work with and assist

communities are part of the students' lived experiences. Recounting his reasons for joining the Colorado State University center, CSU-2 reveals, "I'm hands-on and I can actually see the stuff I do in the program *help the community*...help them figure out how to *build their community*." CSU-2 appreciates being able to observe the results of his community involvement. The civic engagement aspects of the centers' programs also motivated WKU-3's decision to become a member of the Western Kentucky University center. "I'm somebody that likes to get *involved in the community*. I like to reach out to people, and this has really great opportunities for me." The secondary participants enjoy being involved in the community-based learning opportunities that are provided. Explaining her overall experience CSU-4 contends "getting out there and getting *experience in the community* has definitely helped me." The students believe they are benefitting from their civic engagement encounters.

The civic education centers connect the attributes of the ideal citizen to community involvement. The secondary participants experience these principles of citizenship through the centers' activities.

As a citizen, I think I will take a way from this more *community building*, *community development* and not just being there and seeing an issue but actually putting in the work to bring the community closer together and just the unity of it all. (WKU-1)

The students believe they are learning the skills of citizenship. When asked, "What kind of value would you say that your experiences at the Hill House [The Western Kentucky Center] have done for you as a citizen," WKU-2 equates the ideals of citizenship to civic engagement.

It makes me an *active citizen*, it makes me—prior to this I was always very active in making sure I keep up of what was going on and volunteering within the community. This has given me better idea of how I could influence what goes on with my community and by being an *active citizen* you can make a bigger impact. Secondary participants see the experiences of being able to influence and/or making an impact on others as successful civic interactions and as characteristics of an active citizen. WKU-2 views effective community engagement as a valuable citizenship skill. The evidence suggests that the centers’ community-focused activities assisted the students in developing and improving their ability to be civically engaged citizens.

### **Making a Difference**

The student volunteers were able to witness the results of giving back and their civic engagement efforts. MSU-1 describes his personal experiences in terms of making a difference: “I really enjoyed the experience because the client set who come in to our organization, really do need the help. The money that we're able to give back to them really *makes a difference* in their lives.” Community, an abstract, becomes real when the secondary participants meet the people who make up a community. WKU-3 identifies some of the individual effects from the Western Kentucky University center projects that she noticed: “I know that personally, our events have *impacted people's lives* and that's actually what I like to do.” WKU-3 saw the benefits that a civic education center can have on the lives of the people involved in their programs.

The students encounter the phenomenon of citizenship at the individual level—citizen to citizen. “We just help people with issues that need to be addressed. We don't solve problems, but we just help people talk about the issues to *get them to solve it*

*themselves*” (CSU-2). The secondary participants work with groups to help them reach community solutions for local issues. “Actually living in a neighborhood where you work and where you see you've *made a difference* is a big thing for me” (WKU-1). The students see their work as making a difference through the constructive changes and personal effects that their projects can have on communities.

CSU-2 describes some positive results he observed at the Colorado State University center's deliberations,

Being able to sit down with people and communicate the issues at hand, like this is what's important to them and how it *affects what they want to do*....it also gets people *more happy and more involved*, and then just they don't feel so jaded and disillusioned with whatever's going on.

He believes these outcomes last longer than the singular events and become integrated into the clients' lives. The students experience first hand the impact that their civic actions have on others and the community as a whole. WKU-2 hopes the changes that her work creates are constructive: “You can actually *move the community* in a way whether, hopefully that's all in a positive way but you kind of see how your actions *influence the other people* in the community.” She observed the personal and public consequences of civic engagement. A primary aspect of the secondary participants' civic education experience is the act of making a difference in the people and communities with whom they interact.

### **An Awareness of Others**

Civic education centers create situations where the secondary participants get to work with individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, age ranges, and socio-

economic statuses. The students describe one of the benefits of their center experiences as gaining an awareness of others. CSU-1 believes learning about people is a value, as a citizen, he gained from volunteering at the Colorado State University center: “Being more *inclusive of differing ideas*. Giving me the ability to *appreciate different alternatives* and *recognizing that there isn't just one way to do things*. As a citizen, I would hope to see more of these practices in our politics.” He appreciates the opportunity to engage with and discover other people’s points of view. CSU-1 argues that these civic exercises should be a significant part of America’s political system. WKU-3 also saw her interactions with a diverse group as an important aspect of citizenship:

It's made me *realize that we have different kinds of people* out there, and for each group of people, their needs differ....We're all *different people* and we have *different needs*. That's basically what I've learned. Also, it's improved my ability to interact with people, because you come in contact with *various people, different aspects of life*.

She expresses that experiencing different kinds of people increases a person’s ability to interact with others. The students appear to value meeting a diversity of individuals and gaining an awareness of various groups.

CSU-3 compares learning about the world from several points of view to citizenship. When asked, “What kind of value do you think this is adding to you as just a citizen,” she said, “I think probably the biggest thing for me is talking about conflict differently....keeping my mind open to understanding *different perspectives or different iterations*.” The secondary participants, through their civic education experiences, learn to see life from another person’s perspective. “You get to see or hear the community from

*different aspects* and just *learn different things* that you would have never known without living in the community” (WKU-1). The centers’ projects provide the students with chances to expand their understanding of the world around them. CSU-2 describes his personal encounters: “it was interesting seeing my own personal background, how it *differs from people* even who did the same thing.” CSU-2 was able to compare his worldview to the people he met. The student volunteers seemed to gain an understanding, appreciation, and/or awareness of the viewpoints of others.

### **Citizenship Summary**

The student volunteers shared their experiences at the civic education centers in their interview answers. The secondary participants described the citizen values and skills of citizenship they learned. In answering the research question, “What is the essence of contemporary citizenship that is experienced by those who use the centers” (RQ2a), my preliminary phenomenological investigation uncovered four major themes from the student interview responses: (a) giving back, (b) community engagement, (c) making a difference and (d) gaining an awareness of others.

The secondary participants view their various activities with individuals and local groups as giving back to society. The centers’ neighborhood development and social building projects can teach students the citizenship skills of community engagement. The secondary participants believe that their civic interactions make a difference in people’s lives. As a result of these community activities, the students gained an awareness of others. The Western Kentucky University’s Eleventh Street Academy career day provides an example that demonstrates a civic education project where the students experience

giving back, community engagement, making a difference, and gaining an awareness of others.

The secondary participants in the Western Kentucky University's Hill House program live together in an off campus multiplex. Their primary task is to meet and survey the area residents in order to better understand their neighborhood. "We do a lot of needs assessment of what was needed within the community" (WKU-2). Based on the results of their assessments, the students work with the local people and businesses to address the community issues that they discover. "In this case we saw 11<sup>th</sup> street on our street, or the 11<sup>th</sup> street academy is on our street" (WKU-2). The Eleventh Street Academy is an alternative high school. "Most of the kids there have one problem or the other. I'm sure you know alternative schooling" (WKU-3).

Instead of going into a community with preconceived ideas about local issues, the center's advocacy model seeks to work with group members to develop mutual solutions. The secondary participants interviewed the students and teachers at the academy. "We did a survey, as in, what they wanted to do. What do you want to be in the future?" (WKU-3). The survey revealed that several of the academy students were about to graduate, but they were not sure what to do after completing high school.

By this being an alternative school, they're really left out of career fairs and things like that, so we wanted to bridge that gap to let them know that even though you're an alternative school, it's still possible for you to have a future. (WKU-1)

Even though they have made past mistakes, the kids needed to be given a chance to succeed. "Some of those kids are in there for a long time, if they are there for a long time they missed out on opportunities they would have had in the regular public setting. We

identify that as a problem and seek our project to rectify that issue” (WKU-2). The Hill House participants believed they could help the academy students. “It was important for us to make a difference to our street in particular...because they're a small alternative school, they don't get the career and the recruiters coming in” (WKU-2). They identified a specific issue and engaged the community to develop a local solution.

As part of the solution, the Hill House students “hosted a career fair called Let's Get Connected” (WKU-1). The secondary participants asked the Eleventh Street Academy kids what kind of businesses and professions they were interested in. “Based on their responses, we invited the people from different jobs, different careers” (WKU-3). The college students talked to businesses around the neighborhood and they encouraged local companies to join the career fair. “We had over 15 places to come out and support, and the kids really got involved” (WKU-1). The academy students asked questions and they learned about a variety of job opportunities.

The career fair connected the Hill House students to the academy students. They gained an awareness of each other.

I think the most interesting experience that I have had was with the kids at the school. Seeing that these kids open up to you, they tell you their problems because they feel that you're going to be of help. Then, at the end of the day, leaving with a feeling that you're able to do something for these people. (WKU-3)

The experience of making a difference manifests itself within civic engagement interactions, such as the career fair. WKU-1 details a specific case,

I'm not going to say her name, I'll just call her ‘B.’ She's a lion, she was, a lot of energy. A lot of negative energy placed in the wrong areas. She's one of the girls

at the alternative school and she caught the eyes of several of us girls at the Hill House. We worked a lot with her, one of the other students actually took her under her wing a little bit....It was really neat to see her transition and especially because it was the day that we were, she was leaving, we were leaving. That was pretty neat for us to see her from where she was to where she went.

Positive project outcomes appear to be mutually beneficial. For the Hill House students, being able to witness the results of their actions was a significant part of the civic education process. Their goal was to work with the community to create a sustainable program: “We plan to make it an annual event right now, like every year to do, host a career fair for the kids” (WKU-3). The secondary participants gained an awareness of the students’ needs, were able to engage local businesses, and ultimately give back to the community.

The Eleventh Street Academy career fair provides an example of a civic education center project that exhibits the four themes (giving back, community engagement, making a difference, and gaining an awareness of others) from the student interviews. These broad topics represent the essence of citizenship experienced by the secondary participants. The significance of this finding is that the student participants appear to value an active version of the American citizen who learns about others and engages their local communities in order to give back and make a difference. Their experiences seem to compliment the active definition of citizenship discovered in the discourse analysis in chapter 4. I’ll explore the language of citizenship uncovered in my pilot study further in the final chapter. The next section compares the primary and secondary participants’ questionnaire and interview responses to the civic education centers’ rhetoric.

## **Rhetorical Analysis**

I found evidence that the discourse of the managers and staff (primary participants) and the student volunteers (secondary participants) echo the national organizations and their affiliated civic education centers' mission, purpose, and vision statements. The primary participants were given questionnaires asking about their observations and opinions about the respective centers in which they work. The secondary participants were interviewed in order to uncover their lived experiences at the centers. I rhetorically analyzed the primary and secondary participants' responses in order to address the final two research questions: Are the centers' outcomes matching their rhetorical missions (RQ3)? Are the students adopting their respective center's language (RQ3a)?

An examination of the questionnaire responses reveals that the primary participants' perceptions of their organization's strengths and purposes reflect the national organizations' rhetoric: National Issues Forums Institute (Deliberation), Campus Compact (Volunteerism/Service Learning), and American Democracy Project (Advocacy). The managers and staff appear to view the civic education centers as successfully achieving their missions, purposes, and visions. When describing their lived experiences, the student volunteers appear to adopt the language of the centers and the national organizations. Specifically, the secondary participants articulate the civic values of citizenship that they learned. I will present the evidence for these findings by comparing the discourse from each university-based organization to their primary and secondary participants, by tracing the rhetorical chain from the national organizations'

and the centers' mission, purpose, and visions statements to the managers' and staff's discourse, and finally to the student experiences.

### **Colorado State University**

Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) is partly modeled after the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI). The NIFI discursively constructs civic education spaces "where democracy comes alive. It's where the practice of public deliberation is learned by doing" (National Issues Forums, 2014). The organization frames citizenship as a communication process. Carcasson, the CPD founder, and Sprain (2010), one of the center's former assistant directors, claim "deliberation imagines a role for citizens as active and engaged problem-solvers working with others to solve community problems rather than merely taxpayers, consumers, constituents, or voters" (n.p.). The center argues that active citizens engage democracy through discussions and debate.

The Colorado State University (CSU) center's managers and staff describe the main mission of the organization in terms of communication. According to CSU-8, "the primary purpose of the center is to serve the community through changing the way people engage in discussions about 'public issues.'" The primary participants connect democracy to civic dialogue; CSU-6 claims the center seeks to "advance democracy through civil conversation," and CSU-7 states, "I believe the primary purpose is to get people with different perspectives together in order to talk about tough issues and work towards a solution." The center's success is framed as the promotion of deliberative discussions, the expansion of community conversations, and the creation of an "open discursive space" (CSU-8). The managers' and staff's emphasis on communication

reflects the deliberation-based goals of the National Issues Forums Institute and the CSU Center for Public Deliberation.

The Colorado State University students echo the center's communication-centered language in their interview answers when describing their experiences. CSU-1 claims that as a result of his work at the center he is "able to listen to people better...I think my skills in CPD [Center for Public Deliberation] revolve with talking to people in general." CSU-4 learned a similar dialogue-based lesson. "I think that it's made me a much better communicator...It's given me a lot of experience talking." The secondary participants also gained deliberation skills. "I'm more articulate when I talk to people....being able to sit down with people and communicate the issues at hand" (CSU-2). The students believe they have become more proficient in facilitating democratic discussion. CSU-3 explains that she has learned how to engage various viewpoints: "I think probably the biggest thing for me is talking about conflict differently. It's been a huge change." The secondary participants describe an active citizen who listens to others and can converse civilly about contentious issues. The Colorado State University students' communication-focused experiences seem to mirror the center and National Issues Forums Institute's deliberative education goals.

### **Michigan State University**

Michigan State University's Office of the Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement and its affiliate the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement (CSLCE)<sup>2</sup> are Campus Compact members. Campus Compact is committed "to educating students for responsible citizenship in ways that both deepen their

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<sup>2</sup> The CSLCE holds the distinction as "the oldest, continuously operating service-learning center in the country" (Casey & Davidson, April 1, 2008, p. 1).

education and improve the quality of community life” (Mission & Vision, 2016). The organization promotes the idea of an active citizen who is civically educated. The Michigan State University center “provides beyond-the-classroom learning opportunities that are active, service-focused, community-based, mutually beneficial, and integrated with students’ academic programs” (Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, n.d.). Campus Compact and the center define responsible citizenship through community engagement and service.

The Michigan State University center’s managers and staff express the mission of their organization in terms of civic service. MSU-4 proclaims that their primary purpose is “to connect students, faculty, and staff with intentional partnerships with the community for the purpose of engaging in meaningful service.” The primary participants see the center as a conduit between the university and local communities. MSU-5 claims the center connects “students to service opportunities in the community.” They cultivate these partnerships in order to achieve their aim of civically educating students. According to MSU-6, the center accomplishes this objective by “promoting student service through academic and extracurricular means.” MSU-8 says that their goal is “to involve as many students as possible in service and community in ways that are reflected back as positive to their development.” MSU-9 asserts that the center measures its achievements by tracking the number of students who go through their university-wide program: “21,000 MSU students had experiential learning as part of their academic experience last year and the CSLCE’s [Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement] goal is to achieve 70% participation (which would be 26,500 students if the undergraduate enrollment

remains at 38,000).” The managers’ and staff’s description of the civic education center echoes the Campus Compact’s volunteer and service oriented mission.

The Michigan State University students articulate the center’s commitment to service through their experiences. The secondary participants describe their service experiences in terms of current and future volunteer opportunities. “Having this experience has helped me want to continue my volunteer work out into the community” (MSU-1). MSU-3 explains that working with others “makes me feel good and keeps me wanting to volunteer.” MSU-2 had a similar reaction: “it makes me want to always be involved with something....helping people less fortunate.” According to the students, community projects can lead to more involvement. The secondary participants’ experiences appear to match the center’s and Campus Compact’s goal of educating responsible citizens who are civically engaged.

### **Western Kentucky University**

One component of the Western Kentucky University’s mission is that the Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility’s “faculty, staff, and students take a leading role in the American Democracy Project (ADP) programs and curriculum development” (Western Kentucky University, Spring 2013, p. 8). The American Democracy Project distinguishes itself from service learning and volunteer programs.

Far too often, civic engagement in college means volunteering or some form of service learning....students also need to develop skills to engage in the world of politics and public policy. Students need both an understanding of political issues and to be taught the skills of political engagement. (Political Engagement Project, n.d.)

The ADP seeks to take citizenship a step beyond community involvement to a comprehensive civic education model that includes learning about political topics and local concerns. The Western Kentucky University center encourages their students to “engage in successful applied-learning opportunities and work together to improve quality of life by acting as public problem-solvers and effective community-builders” (ALIVE Center for Community Partnerships, 2014). The American Democracy Project and the WKU center combine community engagement with an understanding of political issues.

The Western Kentucky University center managers’ and staff’s questionnaire responses reveal a focus “on civic engagement, an awareness of oppression, and direct action” (WKU-10). The organization seeks to civically educate people through advocacy-based programs. WKU-5 says the center’s primary purpose is “to provide information about local resources to less fortunate ones....Our center provides information about all community gaps such as hunger, homelessness, services for international community, housing, volunteering information and many more.” The students are taught about local political issues through community-based research projects. WKU-9 believes the aim of these civic exercises is “to empower students to know that they have the ability to make positive social change.” The secondary participants learn how to provide “guidance to individuals that do not know where to go or what to do when problems come” (WKU-5). According to the WKU-10, the program is committed to promoting a version of active citizenship that

involves understanding the connections between an individual and their community, determining how they can utilize their assets and talents to create a

stronger community, and working to devise a solution that benefits the community in a way that they choose.

The organization endeavors to teach civic engagement principles by establishing sustainable campus and community relationships that foster active forms of citizenship, promote increased student involvement, and create opportunities for them to impact their cities. WKU-9 says the objective is to offer “courses/spaces for students to reflect on their role in our society.” The primary participants’ descriptions of the Western Kentucky University center’s education goals seem to embody the American Democracy Project’s civic engagement mission.

The Western Kentucky University students’ interview responses also reflect the center’s and American Democracy Project’s efforts to combine community involvement with civic education. “You get to see or hear the community from different aspects and just learn different things that you would have never known without living in the community” (WKU-1). Engaging their neighborhood through the center’s projects becomes a learning experience for the secondary participants. WKU-3 describes the process: “We conducted a survey around the neighborhood, like three streets; and what we wanted to know was things that mattered to the people the most, what they were most concerned about.” The center’s advocacy model connects the students to members of the community. They learn about local political issues and each other: “I’ve experienced a lot of different cultures. I’m very lucky in that aspect. I’ve gotten to know my particular community that I am living in now a little bit better through this process” (WKU-2). The secondary participants paint a picture of how to become a socially involved citizen who is familiar with community concerns. The students appear to use the civic engagement

discourse of the center and American Democracy Project when talking about their experiences.

### **Comparison Overview**

From my preliminary investigation, I am able to answer the final two research questions (RQ3 & RQ3a)<sup>3</sup> in the positive. The centers' rhetorical missions appear to match their outcomes and the student volunteers seem to be adopting their respective center's language. I traced the rhetorical chain from the national organizations to the secondary participants and found that the centers' discourses were transformed into lived experiences through the students. Each organization promoted its version of citizenship, which was rhetorically accepted by its primary and secondary participants. These various constructions of the active citizen influenced the managers' and staff's perceptions of their centers and the students' civic education experiences.

The Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation teaches a variation of the National Issues Forums Institute's deliberative approach to democratic citizenship. The primary participants claim the center achieves their civic education goals by creating communicative spaces where people can come together to talk about tough issues. The Colorado State University secondary participants feel their experiences have made them better communicators and increased their ability to discuss political controversies. The center's communication-focused mission can be traced to the discourse of the managers and staff, and student volunteers.

The Michigan State University's Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement promotes Campus Compact's community service oriented version of

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<sup>3</sup> RQ3: Are the centers' outcomes matching their rhetorical missions? RQ3a: Are the students adopting their respective center's language?

citizenship. The primary participants portray the center as a successful university-wide civic education program that connects students to a variety of service opportunities. The secondary participants talk about these outside relationships and community projects in terms of volunteerism. Campus Compact's concentration on service appears to have influenced the managers' and staff's perceptions of the center and the students' understanding of their experiences.

The Western Kentucky University's Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility advances the American Democracy Project's citizenship model that combines political knowledge with civic engagement. The primary participants argue that the center accomplishes its purpose by training people to be agents of social change. The secondary participants describe an advocacy-focused experience where they learn about the local issues and work with the community to develop solutions. The Western Kentucky University managers, staff, and student volunteers employ the American Democracy Project's conception of civic engagement when talking about the center.

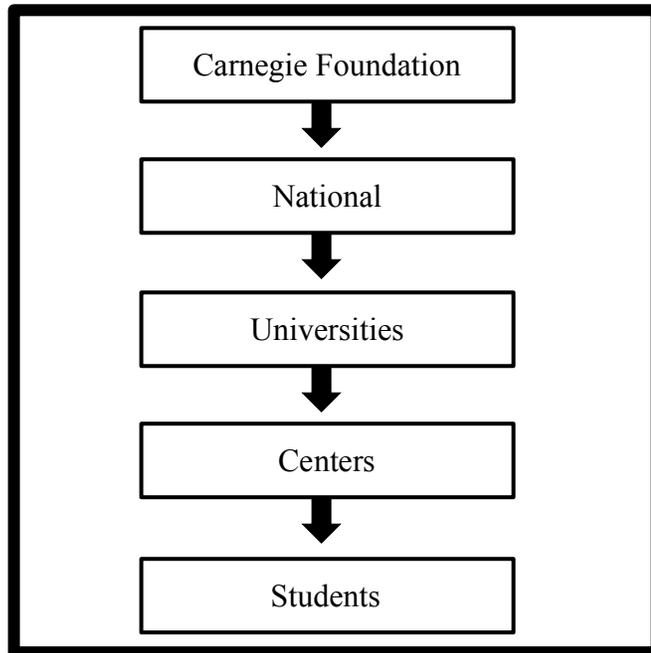
These preliminary findings show that it is possible for the rhetoric of citizenship to be translated into lived experiences. Discursive models of the active citizen might not only influence how people talk about citizenship but also can impact their behaviors. Secondary participants, who learned the discursive form of citizenship (CSU), pursued political conversations. Students who were taught the community service version of the active citizen (MSU) continued to look for volunteer opportunities beyond their participation in the centers. The secondary participants educated in the advocacy-based model (WKU) sought to study communities and work with local groups. Across the civic education centers, the language of citizenship becomes more than a rhetorical construct.

Citizenship becomes an ideological practice. I found evidence that the students acted out the discursive citizen identities they have learned. Next, in the last chapter, I examine the implications of my discourse genre and phenomenological findings.

## **Chapter 6: Analysis of Findings and Recommendations**

I explored three types of university-based civic education centers (deliberation/dialogue forums, volunteerism/civic learning and advocacy training) in terms of communication. My pilot study's objective was to broaden the existing research beyond individualized self-studies and unrelated case studies in order to examine the centers as a comprehensive whole. My primary intention was to develop discursive recommendations for future centers and to better understand the rhetoric of democratic citizenship. The research questions that guided my analysis were: RQ1: Do the centers' rhetoric(s) represent a discourse genre? RQ1a: What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers' discourses? RQ2: Do the centers rhetorically constitute active citizens through their discourse? RQ2a: What is the identity of the 'ideal' citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers? RQ2b: What is the essence of contemporary citizenship that is experienced by those who use the centers? RQ3: Are the centers' outcomes matching their rhetorical missions? RQ3a: Are the students adopting their respective center's language?

In order to answer these questions, I analyzed each respective center's rhetoric across the hierarchal chain from mission, purpose, and vision statements of the Carnegie Foundation through the national organizations (National Issues Forums Institute, The American Democracy Project, Campus Compact) and universities' (Colorado State University, Western Kentucky University, Michigan State University) and the civic education centers, to the questionnaire responses of the managers and staff (primary participants), and the language used by the student volunteers (secondary participants) in their interview answers (See Figure 4).



*Figure 4. Hierarchal Chain*

I used the discourse genre's historical, situation and purpose, and structural tests to identify the rhetoric of the centers as a genre of human communication that expresses democratic voices. The centers' participants were interviewed in order to explore the essence of their experiences. I performed a phenomenological investigation in order to examine the space where the students' experiences and centers' discourses interconnect. Then I rhetorically analyzed my phenomenological results in order to discover if the civic education centers' discourse influenced the students and to evaluate their effectiveness.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Discourse Genre Findings**

I examined civic education centers as a discourse genre. I analyzed the mission, vision, and purpose statements of the Carnegie Foundation, the national organizations (National Issues Forums Institute, The American Democracy Project, Campus Compact), the universities (Colorado State University, Western Kentucky University, Michigan

State University) and their civic education centers along with the questionnaire answers of centers' managers and staff (primary participants) in order to gather evidence to answer four research questions. Do the centers' rhetoric(s) represent a discourse genre (RQ1)? What are the primary elements and shared themes of the centers' discourses (RQ1a)? Do the centers rhetorically constitute active citizens through their discourse (RQ2)? What is the identity of the 'ideal' citizen that is communicatively constructed by the centers (RQ2a)?

A discourse genre is defined as a rhetorical response to a recurring situation, which across instances has a common communicative purpose. I found that civic education centers constitute a discourse genre based on their successful passing of the historical, situation and purpose, and structural test conditions. Based on my findings, I characterized the civic education center genre as (1) a rhetorical response to America's democratic problem of participation that (2) communicates the common purpose of teaching citizenship. Across the centers' discourses, I identified four shared themes: (a) civic education, (b) citizenship, (c) active citizen, and (d) community. These primary elements reveal the rhetorical view of American citizenship put forth by the civic education centers. The managers' and staff's responses paint a picture of a civically engaged, informed, responsible, educated, problem-solver, citizen-leader who participates in a version of community with the goal of improving the society and the world around him or her. I demonstrated that the genre provides a rhetorical space where various concepts of the ideal citizen can be constructed and contested.

## **Phenomenological and Rhetorical Findings**

I performed a phenomenological inquiry aimed at bringing the lived experiences of the secondary participants (student volunteers) to the surface through a series of interview questions. The primary participants (managers and staff) were also given questionnaires asking about their observations and opinions about the respective centers they work in. I rhetorically compared the students' interview responses to the civic education organizations' mission, vision, and purpose statements and the managers' and staffs' questionnaire answers to address the last three research questions. What is the essence of contemporary citizenship that is experienced by those who use the centers (RQ2b)? Are the centers' outcomes matching their rhetorical missions (RQ3)? Are the students adopting their respective center's language (RQ3a)?

When asking the secondary participants what aspects of citizenship they learned from the centers, I found four common themes across the student interview responses: (1) Giving back; (2) Community engagement; (3) Making a difference; (4) Gaining an awareness of others. When describing their lived experiences, the students appear to adopt the language of the centers and reflect the national organizations' rhetoric: National Issues Forums Institute (Deliberation), Campus Compact (Volunteerism/Service Learning), and American Democracy Project (Advocacy). An examination of the primary participant questionnaire responses showed that managers and staff view the civic education centers as successfully achieving their respective missions, purposes, and visions.

## Analysis of Findings

Those funding or providing resources to civic education centers have evaluated their specific projects from within their organizations, and outside researchers have looked at individual case studies. I found no evidence that anyone has analyzed the centers as a comprehensive whole. With this in mind, I looked at three national organizations (National Issues Forums Institute, The American Democracy Project, Campus Compact) and their corresponding universities (Colorado State University, Western Kentucky University, Michigan State University) and their respective centers. I found that they constitute a discourse genre—a genre that is characterized as a rhetorical response to America’s democratic problem of participation that communicates the common purpose of teaching citizenship.

The influence of the three national organizations is an important factor. As a whole, these organizations rhetorically spread the civic education genre to nearly 1,500 universities and centers.<sup>1</sup> The organizations have documents that discursively outline the democratic problem of participation and portray United States democracy as being in trouble. The hundreds of colleges and universities that joined the national organizations have signed on to these documents. The university-based civic education centers’ mission, vision, and purpose statements promote citizenship training as a solution to the country’s lack of civic involvement issues.

Each of the national organizations (National Issues Forums Institute, Campus Compact, and American Democracy Project) developed its respective rhetorical concepts of the ideal citizen based on what it perceived to be the cause of the country’s citizen

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<sup>1</sup> Campus Compact is on nearly 1,100 universities, the American Democracy Project works with more than 250 colleges and universities, and the National Issues Forums Institute lists 113 partner networks.

participatory problems and its respective beliefs of how Americans should act. The civic education center genre provides a discursive space not only where a range of ideas about what constitutes citizenship can be negotiated and advanced, but also where democracy itself is rhetorically constructed. In analyzing the implications of my finding, I argue that the genre (1) reveals democracy as a communication process, (2) exposes the affective aspects of citizenship, and (3) expands the sphere of democracy.

### **Democracy as Communication**

Identifying civic education centers as a genre of human discourse reveals one of the crucial roles communication plays in America's form of democracy. The United States Constitution's First Amendment (1792) outlines a discourse-based democratic decision-making process.<sup>2</sup> The citizens have the right to peacefully assemble, to speak and to publish their beliefs, and to transmit their ideas to their representatives. American democracy is framed as a rhetorical practice that includes interpersonal, private, and public forms of communication. I found that civic education centers provide places where people can practice these rights, and learn to develop other citizenship skills.

The civic education center genre establishes citizenship as a learned discursive practice. More than just a language of citizenship, citizenship is framed as a form of language. As a form of language, the rhetorical construction of a country's ideal citizen defines how a country's governmental system functions. For example, politically engaged citizens are needed in a democracy. A country cannot be a democracy if the ideal citizen is discursively defined as being a subject to a king, queen, or dictator. The nation would be monarchy or dictatorship. The discourse of the ideal citizen creates a communicative

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<sup>2</sup> "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances" (United States First Amendment, 1792).

space where national ideologies can be constructed and challenged. Citizenship is a form of language that communicates a nation's ideological identity.

I found that the civic education center genre's purpose is to teach citizenship. Each national organization rhetorically promotes a different version of the civically engaged citizen: the ideal citizen volunteers in the community (Campus Compact), deliberates local issues (National Issues Forums Institute), or is an advocate who works with individuals and groups (American Democracy Project). The structure and function of these rhetorical constructs shape the characteristics of the ideal citizen that an individual and/or group act out.<sup>3</sup> The centers transform the discourse of democratic citizenship into an ideological practice. I found evidence that the organizations' civic engagement models not only influenced how the student participants talked about citizenship but also impacted their current and future behaviors. The students revealed in their interviews that their center experiences taught them to value an active version of the American citizen, who learns about others and engages their local communities in order to give back and make a difference. The students' descriptions of their experiences reflected the discursive missions and visions of the national organizations. I demonstrated that the students' interview responses echoed the language of the civic education centers.

Studying civic education centers as a genre exposes an important aspect of the rhetorical foundation of the American democratic system. It contributes to the field by bringing to light significant connections between communication and citizenship.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> According to Black (1970), "in all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something but to be something" (p. 95).

<sup>4</sup> "The field's long-term concern with equipping students with the prerequisite skills of citizenship, which was a dominant concern of the field of communication studies" (Carcasson, Black, and Sink, 2010, p. 2).

genre creates a space where the primary components of United States democracy (i.e., individual rights) can be studied as a form of communication.

### **The Affective Aspects of Citizenship**

I discovered how citizenship feels. My phenomenological investigation revealed that the student participants were emotionally affected by their civic education center experiences and the situations they encountered. I found that citizenship is experienced both privately and publicly. Citizenship happens amongst citizens, within communities, and brings various groups together, but in the end, it is a personal journey.

Although the civic education centers are focused on giving back to the community, their activities appear to affect students on an individual level. Learning the skills of active citizenship can “help grow you as a person” (MSU-1). WKU-3 says the experience taught her about herself. “It's helped me to gain more understanding about my personality...it's given me a better opportunity to assess myself and to know the kind of person I am better.” In their interview responses, the students expressed feeling enjoyment, happiness, and being humbled as they witnessed the results of their actions on groups and/or individuals. Civic engagement acts, such as giving back and making a difference, seem to positively affect how students talk about their citizenship experiences. CSU-3 describes it as a life changing experience: “it’s just changed me, the whole way I look at the world.” Gaining an awareness of others not only expands the students’ worldviews, but also transforms them individually. WKU-1 depicts “an eye opener experience...this has really affected me in a major way...It stretched me beyond measures.” The students describe learning to become an active citizen as transformational.

The civic education center genre's purpose of teaching citizenship creates beneficial experiences for the student participants. According to MSU-3, engaging individuals from the local community inspired continued civic engagement. "It's something that makes me feel good and keep wanting to volunteer." I found that civic education experiences can elicit positive feelings that lead to an integration of citizenship habits, such as volunteering and community involvement, into the students' lives. "Having this experience has helped me want to continue my volunteer work out into the community" (MSU-1). WKU-3 reports a similar reaction; "the main thing I'm going to take with me is the ability to always try to get involved wherever I am." For the students, giving back appears to beget more giving back; "it makes me want to always be involved" (MSU-2).

My phenomenological inquiries provide a window into the students' individual expressions of American citizenship. Coming into contact with the civic education center genre's purpose of teaching citizenship, student participants learn the deeds of the civically engaged citizen and in the process learn about themselves. The transformation into an active citizen is a personal experience. I argue that the affective aspects of the students' experiences are a crucial component in solving the democratic problem of participation. If citizenship is perceived as producing negative outcomes (i.e., disagreements, fights, feelings of powerlessness), then people might be less likely to be involved. I demonstrated that civic education centers can produce positive feelings that encourage continued civic participation. CSU-2 explains that community engagement "gets people more happy and more involved."

## Extending the Sphere of Democracy

Civic education centers bring a variety of people and voices together providing discursive spaces where the principles of the United States republic<sup>5</sup> can be practiced and learned, which works to increase participation. In Federalist Paper #10,<sup>6</sup> James Madison (1787/2001) explains that one of the primary goals of the United States system is to increase the number of people and groups who participate. “*Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests* [emphasis added]; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens” (p. 58). The expansion of the sphere of governance is accomplished by giving “We the People” control over our community affairs. Madison (1787/2001) describes the American form of government as a constitutional “republic, by which I mean a government in which the *scheme of representation* [emphasis added] takes place” (p. 60). The United States Constitution’s scheme of representation guarantees that the states, counties, cities, and townships have local control.<sup>7</sup> The democratic problem of participation occurs at each of these local levels.

Madison describes the essence of the democratic problem of participation as a necessity to include more people and a variety of points of view in the political system. I have found that civic education centers seek to solve America’s participatory problems

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<sup>5</sup> "Action by the citizens in person, in affairs within their reach and competence, and in all others by representatives, chosen immediately, and removable by themselves, constitutes the essence of a republic." –Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, April 24, 1816.

<sup>6</sup> The Federalist Paper authors promoted a government that would engage citizens “through deliberative democracy to make policy decisions concerning the direction of government; collaboration among government organizations, citizens, and stakeholders to implement the will of the people” (Bingham and O’Leary, 2011, p. S81).

<sup>7</sup> “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government” (U.S. Constitution, 1789, Art. 4 Sect. 4).

through the common purpose of teaching citizenship. They teach students to be active citizens through civic engagement projects that extend the sphere of democracy by bringing a diversity of groups and individuals together along with their various ideas and beliefs.

My phenomenological analysis revealed that the students, who participated in the centers' community activities, shared the experience of gaining an awareness of others. I discovered that the experience of gaining an awareness of others led the students to focus on their communities' concerns and problems. In their interview answers, the students talk about how they were exposed to local issues. MSU-1 says that a benefit of working with people from "different socioeconomic standings" is "having a better idea of the full community that you're in." WKU-2 explains that she learned to be more aware of her neighbors' points of view. "I've gotten to know my particular community that I am living in now a little bit better through this process." With national politics garnering a large amount of attention, community affairs can be diminished.

CSU-2 claims that his civic education experience taught him the importance of local issues.

I've never really thought about local government too much until I got into it. Then I realized how important it was, and I've been aware of like, hey, I need to be more involved at the local level rather than just sitting there and focusing on stuff that's going on in D.C. that I really don't have much say over, but I can actually influence stuff that's going on here in my own town.

National issues, as the student suggests, are difficult to have any substantial control over and can be frustrating. For CSU-2, learning about community politics was empowering

and enlightening. I found that an awareness of others and local issues can make politics feel more accessible.

The civic education center genre's common purpose of teaching citizenship appears to reflect the rhetorical goals of the United States' constitutional republic. The genre provides effective solutions to the democratic problem of participation that address fundamental components of America's democratic system (i.e., expanding the sphere of democracy and democratic representation). The centers expand the sphere of democracy by bringing a diversity of individuals and various groups into the political process. I found that the students articulate the American principles of representation through their experiences of gaining an awareness of others. They learned about community concerns and focused on local issues. Civic education centers seem to increase the number and variety of people who are civically involved and make politics more accessible to those who participate.

### **Center Recommendations**

One purpose of my pilot study was to develop recommendations for current and future civic education centers. After reviewing my findings, I saw three areas that could contribute to their furthered success. The centers should: (1) combine their approaches; (2) address community issues; and (3) encourage an awareness of others.

#### **Combine Approaches**

The centers should combine their approaches. The civic education center approaches (deliberation/dialogue forums, volunteerism/civic learning, and advocacy training) appear to compliment each other. For example, the students who were taught volunteerism also learned how to deliberate and dialogue with and advocated for the

groups and individuals with whom they were working. Each method appears to include aspects of the other methods, but because the centers are focused on their singular approach, the students are not learning the best practices of the other approaches. I argue for a comprehensive civic education center model that teaches participants styles of deliberation, volunteer strategies, and advocacy tactics. I believe active citizenship encompasses all of these skills.

### **Address Community Issues**

The centers should address community issues. I demonstrated that having participants focus on the local communities and their concerns allowed them to see the results of their efforts, which led to positive experiences and contributed to their continued civic engagement. The centers should avoid looking at issues on the national level because some of the students viewed this as frustrating and conflict-ridden. The frustration of not being able to influence national outcomes can fade when people are working together to solve neighborhood problems and/or other lower level affairs. Partnerships with area businesses, community groups and organizations, and municipal level governments help connect participants to local issues. This is demonstrated by the Western Kentucky University's 11th Street Academy project that shows how a neighborhood can come together to solve local issues. The students and community members created a career day for the alternative high school's graduating seniors. They worked with local businesses to develop a sustainable solution that will continue to benefit the community as a whole. WKU-3 proudly proclaimed, "So, we plan to make it an annual event right now, like every year to do, host a career fair for the kids at the 11th street elementary school, yeah!" I recommend that civic education center activities and

projects should engage their participants in the problems and concerns of their local communities.

### **Encourage an Awareness of Others**

The centers should encourage an awareness of others. The United States form of government needs a diversity of voices and community representatives to maintain its status as a democracy. Each center has an advocacy component that encourages the students to work with individuals and/or groups. These interactions serve to improve the interpersonal communication aspects of citizenship. Center participants are given opportunities to learn about the needs and beliefs of others. I found that these exchanges of ideas led to an increased tolerance of others and their ideologies. When an individual comes to understand “the other,” the label of “other” can disappear. The students referred to these experiences as gaining an awareness of others.

Embedded in the concept of citizenship is the existence of a diversity within a group or community. The students experienced this inclusivity as an important aspect of citizenship. WKU-3 explains, “It's made me realize that we have different kinds of people out there, and for each group of people, their needs differ.” Inclusive spaces entice more people to participate in the political process, which extends the sphere of American democracy. I recommend that the centers should go out of their way and intentionally bring a diversity of groups and populations together.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

My pilot study provides a basic foundation for understanding civic education centers as a genre of human discourse. My findings are preliminary because of the limited scope of the study. My discourse and phenomenological investigation sampled

three of the nearly 1,500 centers associated with the national organizations (Campus Compact, National Issues Forums Institute, and American Democracy Project). I looked at 15 managers and staff and 10 student volunteers. I received very few negative responses. A self-selected sample was utilized that may have potentially biased the results towards center advocates who sought to promote their respective center's positive aspects. My investigation was limited to higher education centers that represent a small portion of the civic education center universe. To develop greater support of the genre, future studies could examine an increased number of national organizations and include other types of centers such as community-based and/or government-sponsored centers. In order to expand the understanding of the genre's structural content and the external effects of its rhetoric, the centers' community clients and business partners could also be interviewed. In addition to a discourse genre analysis, it would be beneficial to include a cluster analysis<sup>8</sup> to test my findings and discover additional content themes across the organizations, managers and staff, and secondary participants.

### **Final Thoughts**

My pilot study's primary contribution to the field of communication is the identification of civic education centers as a genre of human discourse. The genre provides an area of study that rhetorically illuminates how various concepts of citizenship are constructed, challenged, and taught. Examining civic education centers as a genre reveals current trends and contemporary views of citizenship. Additionally, combining a discourse analysis of the mission, vision, and purpose statements of the organizations and

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<sup>8</sup> A cluster analysis (SPSS or another statistical program) could be used to examine 100-300 mission, vision, and purpose statement samples from the close to 1,500 centers connected to the national organizations to see if they share similar linguistic variables and to verify my proposed civic education center genre.

the centers' managers and staff, along with a phenomenological investigation of the students' experiences offers a communicative model for evaluating an organization's effectiveness. I found that some students not only adopted the language of their centers but also acted out the version of the ideal citizen they were taught. It appears that the rhetoric of citizenship can lead to action.

One of the more important findings of my pilot study is the theme of 'gaining an awareness of others' that was reported by the students when describing their center experiences. The civic education centers draw in a diversity of people from different backgrounds and belief systems. I found that these interactions with the community could influence the students' behaviors and values. The students also talked about how working in local communities made them more tolerant of others and gave them an understanding of a variety of viewpoints. What makes this finding significant is the theme 'gaining an awareness of others' directly reflects James Madison's description of one the primary goals of the United States republic. In Federalist #10, Madison (1787/2001) explains the importance of solving the democratic problem of participation: "Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens" (p. 58). Extending the sphere of democratic participation in order to include more people in the political process broadens the scope and can prevent the impact a singular point of view a majority coalition might have on a minority party.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Madison (1787/2001) explains, in Federalist #10, the harmful effects of what he refers to as 'pure democracy.' "A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual" (p.56).

I have found American democracy to be counterintuitive in the sense that it works best when people disagree and hold different positions. The experience of gaining an awareness of others creates a rhetorical space for constructive argument.<sup>10</sup> These interactions allow a diversity of parties and interests to come together in order to address and/or solve local issues. When people assemble with like-minded peers who have similar life experiences, it can lead to an intolerance of outsiders who think differently. I argue that the civic education center experience of ‘gaining an awareness of others’ introduces more tolerance and brings a great diversity of people into the political system. This increased tolerance combined with local level engagement can minimize the potential fragmentation of society into homogenous groups.

Another significant finding is the affective aspects of citizenship–politics are not only local; politics are personal. When examining the student experiences, I discovered how citizenship feels. The participants had a variety of reactions. Working with people and groups creates relationships and establishes emotional connections. The students learned about others and themselves. They discovered who they were as individuals and citizens through political participation and local involvement. Civic engagement is a powerful personal and interpersonal experience that encourages more participation. Not all actions are influenced by logical decisions, or fact-based arguments. When examining American democracy we should to take into account the emotional elements of political and civic involvement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Argument begins as a kind of tension between contending positions, but those positions—at least at times—should be able to converge toward agreement. At certain wonderful moments, argument can discover transcendent positions which both accommodate and transform the contending views” (Osborn & Osborn, 1995, p. 252).

<sup>11</sup> Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, and Hutchings (2011) argue, “It is important to recognize the unique role emotions can play in the participatory dynamics of campaigns and elections” (p. 168).

The experience of ‘gaining an awareness of others’ and the affective aspects of civic engagement reported by the students are examples of how the civic education center genre through its purpose of teaching citizenship addresses the democratic problem of participation. There is evidence that the centers taught their students to be civically engaged, informed, responsible, educated, problem-solving, citizen-leaders who participate in a version of community with the goal of improving the society and the world around them. I found that the students adopted the language of the centers and acted out the concepts of the ideal citizen that they learned. The proposed civic education center genre presents communication scholars with not only a means of rhetorically analyzing contemporary forms of citizenship, but also provides a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the discourse of civic education in America.

In his farewell, President Obama addressed the democratic problem of participation.

All of this depends on our participation; on each of us accepting the responsibility of citizenship, regardless of which way the pendulum of power happens to be swinging. Our Constitution is a remarkable, beautiful gift. But it's really just a piece of parchment. It has no power on its own. We, the people, give it power. (Applause.) We, the people, give it meaning. With our participation, and with the choices that we make, and the alliances that we forge. (Applause.) Whether or not we stand up for our freedoms. Whether or not we respect and enforce the rule of law. That's up to us. (Jan. 10, 2017)

As scholars, it is up to us to understand the depths of the United States form of democracy. As professors, it is up to us to teach the skills of active citizenship. As

citizens, it is up to us to provide solutions to America's problem of participation. In the end, 'We the People' are the United States of America—without us, there is no U.S.

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## **Appendix A: Research Summary**

This study examines Citizen (ship) / Civic Engagement Centers (CCEC) based in higher education institutions whose missions are to teach people how to civically engage each other and/or the government. The centers promote democratic participation through community volunteerism, deliberative/dialogue forums, and political advocacy training. Involvement in voluntary organizations and the performance of civic duties appears to teach people how to act as citizens. The centers could provide a vehicle from which to explore America's democracy and contribute to the scholarship concerning United States' citizenship.

The study explores these centers in terms of communication, by focuses on the rhetoric of the centers (i.e., mission statements, press releases and other public pronouncements, instructional/education program descriptions, published works, online presence, and academic research on these centers) and the discourse of the primary participants (staff and management). One goal is to test whether the centers represent a genre of human communication that discursively expresses democratic voices.

Additionally, a phenomenological inquiry into the experiences of the secondary participants, those who attend or take part in the centers' activities, will attempt to distill the essence citizenship. By investigating these civic organizations and their participants, I hope to paint a comprehensive picture of the contemporary ideal United States' citizen, contribute to the scholarship concerning American democracy, and develop a set of guidelines for current and/or future centers.

## **Appendix B: Participant Interviews**

Follow up interviews with the primary participants, who have filled out the questionnaire, will be based on their individual answers. The goal of the follow up is to expand on and to gain a better understanding of their written responses. The secondary participants will be individually interviewed. The aim of the interview questions is to bring the experiences of the center's secondary participants to the surface. Here is a sample of possible questions: How did you find out about the center? Why did you come to the centers? What value, if any, did you get out of your participation? How did you experience the event? What are your reflections on the activities?

The time and place of each interview will be scheduled with the participants. The 20 to 30 min in-depth interviews will be informal and unstructured with follow up questions that will vary depending on the individual responses. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. During the interviews, precautions (i.e., turning off the recorder if the interviewee provides potentially damaging information) will be taken to minimize the participants' risk. The volunteer has the right to request that any portion of the interview not be used.

## Appendix C: Questionnaire

Participant ID # \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

If you need additional space, feel free to continue your answers on the back of the form

What do you believe to be the primary purpose of the center?

What societal issues or problems does the center attempt to solve and/or fix?

Does the center promote active citizenship, if so, how?

What are the center's criteria for success?

Which communities and/or groups does your center seek to service and how?

## **Appendix D: IRB Consent Form**

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

#### **Contemporary American Citizenship: A Genre Study of Citizen (ship)/Civic Engagement Centers**

You are being invited to take part in a pilot research study that explores United States' democracy and American citizenship through university-based organizations whose missions are to teach individuals how to civically engage each other and/or the government. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are either a participant in today's activity or a member of the organization's management or staff. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 20 people to do so nationally.

The person in charge of this study is Brandon Chase Goldsmith of University of Memphis Department of Communication. He is being guided in this research by *Dr. Katherine Hendrix*. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

**[WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY: *Describe, in lay terms, the purpose of the study*]**

The purpose of this investigation is to uncover whether or not university-based civic engagement organizations share common communication structures. To accomplish this goal the study explores the mission statements, press releases and other public pronouncements, instructional/education program descriptions, published works, online

presence, and previous academic research on these centers. Another goal is understand the experiences of the people who participate in the centers' activities and to find out if there are any common themes.

By doing this study, we hope to learn how the centers function in order to develop communication guidelines for current and/or future organizations. Additionally, exploring these civic engagement centers could contribute to a better understanding of United States' democracy and current American perceptions of what makes a "good citizen."

**[ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?]**

Individuals under 18 years of age and participants who have not completed or have not been present during the entirety of the organization's activity or event are excluded from volunteering.

**[WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?]**

The research interviews will be conducted at the organization's primary university facility or at a location agreed upon by the participant. The interview will take about 20 to 30 minutes and will comprise the total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study.

## **[WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?]**

Primary participants will be recruited during the initial contact and given the questionnaire with a one-week deadline. After receiving the finished questionnaire, I will schedule a follow up interview with each individual participant.

Interview times and locations will be scheduled with the participants at the end of the activity.

*Tell the subject what to expect. Describe all procedures in lay language, using simple terms and short sentences. If the study involves numerous procedures and/or visits, give a time-line description of the procedures that will be performed.*

*Study participants will be comprised of a convenience sample of self selective volunteers. Provide a lay description of the randomization procedures, if applicable, and describe the chances of being assigned to any one group. Define randomization in simple language such as "by chance."*

## **[WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?]**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing (filling out questionnaires and being interviewed) have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

**[WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?]**

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

**[DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?]**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. If you are a student and decide not to take part in this study, your choice will have no effect on your academic status or grades.

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

**[WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?]**

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will

keep your name and other identifying information private. *(If you are collecting social security numbers, inform subjects of this fact. Tell subjects whether they can withhold their social security number and still participate.)*

**[IF THE STUDY IS NOT ANONYMOUS:]**

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. *(Insert description of procedure(s) used for protecting confidentiality of data including paper records, computer records, jump drives and portable storage device)*

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. *(Insert circumstances in which the subject's data could be shown or reported to others)* For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court [*IF APPLICABLE*: or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Memphis [*LIST ANY OTHER AGENCIES SUCH AS THE FUNDING AGENCY OR STAT/FEDERAL DEPT.*].

**CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?**

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

**WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator,

\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-3074. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

*(When developing the consent form, please format to ensure the signature lines fall on a page containing text.)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## IRB Approval 2967

Beverly Jacobik /bjacobik1 on behalf of Institutional Review Board

Mon 11/25/2013 12:38 PM

To: Brandon Chase Goldsmith <bcgldsmt@ <bcgldsmt@memphis.edu>; Cc: Katherine G Hendrix <khendrix@ <khendrix@memphis.edu>;

Hello,

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed and approved your submission in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations as well as ethical principles.

**PI NAME:** Brandon Goldsmith **CO-PI:** **PROJECT TITLE:** Contemporary American Citizenship: A Genre Study of Citizen(ship)/Civic Engagement Centers **FACULTY**

**ADVISOR NAME (if applicable):** Katherine Hendrix **IRB ID:** #2967 **APPROVAL**

**DATE:** 11/4/2013 **EXPIRATION DATE:** 11/3/2014 **LEVEL OF REVIEW:** Exempt

**RISK LEVEL DETERMINATION:** No more than minimal *Please Note: Modifications do not extend the expiration of the original approval* **Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:**

**1. If this IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.**

**2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be completed and sent to the board.**

**3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval, whether the approved protocol was reviewed at the Exempt, Expedited or Full Board level.**

**4. Exempt approval are considered to have no expiration date and no further review is necessary unless the protocol needs modification.**

**Approval of this project is given with the following special obligations:**

**Thank you, Ronnie Priest, PhD Institutional Review Board Chair The University of Memphis.**

*Note: Review outcomes will be communicated to the email address on file. This email should be considered an official communication from the UM IRB. Consent Forms are no longer being stamped as well. Please contact the IRB at [IRB@memphis.edu](mailto:IRB@memphis.edu) if a letter on IRB letterhead is required.*