

## DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT SOCIAL/CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL REASONING

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*U-M students visit community-based organizations in Detroit on a weekly basis to work on projects aimed at improving the wellbeing of children and their families, such as tutoring youth in afterschool programs. Their site visits are supplemented by relevant readings, class discussions and written reflections on topics such as developmental psychology, poverty, and education, which connect what they are learning in class to what they experience in the field.<sup>1</sup>*

*U-M students with social identities that have historically experienced conflict and differential status come together to engage in critical self-reflection and purposeful dialogue to better understand each other's point of view and solve problems regarding race relations.<sup>2</sup>*

*Using case studies, U-M students learn about the multiple and often competing viewpoints of stakeholders in land management. They attend a local planning commission meeting and reflect on the economic, scientific, and moral implications of various land-use proposals.<sup>3</sup>*

### Introduction

The focus areas of this Occasional Paper are social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning. Among its learning goals, the TLTC program states, "Students should develop an understanding of the human, social, and environmental impacts of actions, and develop the ethical reasoning tools to make sustainable and responsible decisions; and they must develop their ability to hold and reason across the perspectives of multiple stakeholders" (Third Century Initiative Student Learning, <http://thirdcentury.umich.edu/student-learning/>).

This paper begins with a review of the various ways in which social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning have been conceptualized, followed by a discussion about why they are important learning outcomes to develop among college students. It then summarizes different approaches to fostering social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning, and ends with a discussion of how to assess a

<sup>1</sup> Lorraine Gutierrez, "Psych 325: Detroit Initiative," <http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/detroitinitiative/>

<sup>2</sup> Monita Thompson and Kelly Maxwell, "Program on Intergroup Relations," <https://igr.umich.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> Richard Norton, "Environ 408: Land Use Policy, the Law and Environment," LSA Course Guide

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variety of outcomes that represent different dimensions of these constructs, with an emphasis on choosing appropriate measures.

### **What Are Social/Civic Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning?**

Broadly speaking, definitions of social/civic responsibility emphasize that individuals have a responsibility to improve the quality of life both in their local communities and within global systems (Erlich, 2000; Finley, 2011; Hollander, 2009; Nishishiba, Nelson, & Shinn, 2005). At a 2015 meeting of the Council for Engaged Civic Education at the University of Michigan, one member described civic engagement as the “duty to ensure that our actions are in keeping with the needs, desires, and aspirations of the communities we serve.” Another member defined it as “the responsibility to recognize that everyone, in addition to being an individual, is a member of civil society, enjoying the benefits of that membership.” Similarly, civic engagement scholar Thomas Erlich (2000) defines civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference” (p. vi).

Erlich’s definition suggests that social/civic engagement is multidimensional, and several scholars have identified four capacities that collectively enable successful social/civic engagement. While using slightly different terminology, there is general agreement that these capacities include 1) an understanding of social problems, 2) an understanding of how these problems

might be addressed, 3) the development of moral or ethical character or values, and 4) the motivation to act in congruence with moral and ethical standards in trying to address these problems (Branson & Quigley, 1998; Finley, 2011; Kirlin, 2003; Lagemann & Lewis, 2012; Patrick, 2003; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). Perhaps the most comprehensive description of these capacities is documented in a report created by The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) in an effort to lead a nationwide dialogue and renewal of civic learning in higher education.

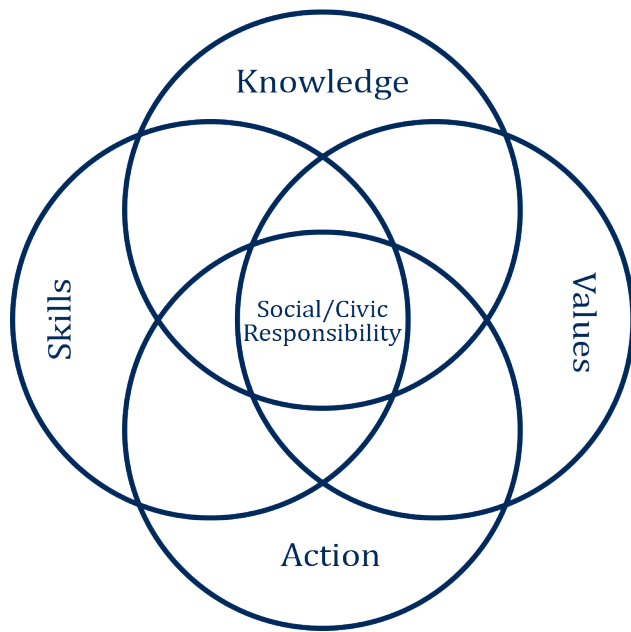
According to the report, student development of these capacities involves four key dimensions: knowledge, skills, values, and action. Furthermore, developmental gaps in any of the four areas would bring into question the extent to which students had effectively developed their capacity for civic engagement. For instance, some scholars stress that individuals who have the knowledge and skills to contribute but do not commit time and energy to important causes are not civically engaged (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). Likewise, Erlich (2000) notes, “A person can become civically and politically active without good judgment and a strong moral compass, but it is hardly wise to promote that kind of involvement” (p. xxi). Thus, it is the intersection of these capacities that make social/civic responsibility possible (see Figure 1).

### **Knowledge**

In the context of social/civic responsibility, knowledge – also called intellect (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012) or

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*Students need to develop a variety of critical thinking and interpersonal skills in order to contribute successfully to today’s increasingly globalized world. The Office of the Provost at the University of Michigan has implemented a plan known as Transforming Learning for a Third Century (TLTC) as part of its broader Third Century Initiative. This plan aims to foster development of such skills, with special emphasis on five distinct learning goals: 1) Creativity; 2) Intercultural engagement; 3) Social/ civic responsibility and ethical reasoning; 4) Communication, collaboration and teamwork; and 5) Self-agency, and the ability to innovate and take risks. The TLTC program provides funding and assistance to faculty members who are executing novel programs and are gathering evidence of student learning around one or more of these learning goals. The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) has partnered with TLTC to provide assistance to faculty members in designing and implementing appropriate assessment and evaluation plans for their programs. One way in which this will be accomplished is through provision of Occasional Papers summarizing the definitions, previous research, and a variety of methods and measures for assessing outcomes associated with each learning goal that can be used as references for both early stage planning and later stage implementation of program assessment. Each Occasional Paper was also shaped by ideas generated by U-M faculty, staff and students during on-campus meetings and a series of 2015-16 lunch discussions convened by CRLT.*



**Figure 1. Dimensions of Social/Civic Responsibility**

literacy (The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012) – is described as “the content of what citizens ought to know” (Branson & Quigley, 1998, p. 3) and is often consistent with what one may learn in history, civics, political science, economics, or sociology courses. From a national perspective, this includes understanding democratic movements from both historical and sociological perspectives (e.g., the feminist and civil rights movements) and understanding the function and structure of governments and how to influence change within them. From a global perspective, it includes understanding the comparative differences and similarities among types of political and economic systems and gaining exposure to diverse cultures, religions, histories, and values that influence both national cultures as well as personal identities. In addition to historical understanding, students should be aware of current events and have detailed knowledge of the contemporary social issues they seek to address (Kirlin, 2003; Levine, 2012). For instance, someone who is concerned about disparities in academic achievement should be familiar with federal, state, and local policies that influence educational outcomes, in addition to the multiple perspectives held by stakeholders (parents, teachers, unions, politicians, taxpayers, education researchers) regarding the nature of the problem.

### **Skills**

Civic engagement *skills* are abilities that allow students to effectively process information and make reasoned judgments about how to proceed. These capacities include both intellectual and participatory skills (Branson & Quigley, 1998). *Intellectual skills* are primarily internal and include the ability to obtain and evaluate different sources of information and perspectives, critically analyze arguments, and reason quantitatively in an effort to form an unbiased position on social issues (The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012). Other terms used to describe these abilities include civic inquiry (The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012), critical thinking, and cognitive skills (Kirlin, 2003). *Participatory skills* represent exchanges between individuals, including working cooperatively with others (*interaction skills*; Mutz, 2002; Patrick, 2000), keeping track of issues and how they are being handled (*monitoring skills*), and articulating a well-reasoned and compelling argument both in writing and orally (*influencing skills*; Battistoni, 1997; Boyte, 2000; Patrick, 2000, 2003; Schwadel, 2002; Torney-Purta, 2002; Verba et al., 1995) and conveying one’s message effectively to different audiences (Branson & Quigley, 1998; The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012; Verba et al., 1995).

### **Values**

*Values*, also referred to as morality (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012), ethos (The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012), or dispositions (Branson & Quigley, 1998), are a set of principles and character virtues that are integral to maintaining a democracy. They are beliefs about the behaviors that are thought to be exhibited by good citizens. Examples include affirmation of equality and dignity of all human beings, respecting the rights of others, accepting responsibilities for one’s actions, exhibiting empathy and tolerance, and feeling responsible for the larger good (Branson & Quigley, 1998; Kirlin, 2003; The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012).

### **Action**

*Action* is described as participation in collective society and includes both political and non-political activity. Five common types of civic engagement

action include 1) advocacy, 2) direct action, 3) organizational participation, 4) volunteerism, and 5) voting (Nishishiba et al., 2005). These activities encompass behaviors such as boycotting, writing a letter to one’s congressperson, and participating in unions or professional organizations, but also starting a community organization, creating a social venture, or otherwise building the capacity and opportunities of a community.

### Using Ethical Reasoning and Moral Courage to Apply Values

Ethical reasoning requires students to learn how to articulate their values and apply them to ethical dilemmas. This skill is necessary because morals or values will influence an individual’s approach to social/civic responsibility in a number of ways. First, values often conflict with one another, and students must derive methods and rationales for deciding the circumstances under which one equally-valued position takes precedence over another. Second, individuals often have to make decisions about the right course of action, which requires the ability to foresee possible outcomes from multiple points of view. Finally, by using ethical reasoning to influence judgments about right courses of action, students are encouraged to identify justifications for their opinions, which can influence how those opinions are shaped and be helpful when trying to persuade others. In all

three of these situations, the competing values and needs of different stakeholders must be considered and sometimes weighed against each other. In short, ethical reasoning allows students to effectively, consistently, and persuasively apply moral principles to complex and nuanced real-world problems, which can be described as “responsible opinion-holding.”

Kohlberg (1984) identified six stages of ethical reasoning development, which are summarized in Table 1, below. In general, college students exhibit conventional and postconventional reasoning skills (see Gilligan, 1982, for an alternative interpretation of these stages).

Many prosocial behaviors, such as those described in the above section on action, are predicated on ethical standards and are easily undertaken. However, individuals may also encounter situations in which ethical behavior is difficult to carry out, and these situations require moral courage. Moral courage has been defined as a specific type of prosocial behavior that has high social costs (e.g., punishment or rejection) and no benefits for the protagonist (Bierhoff, 2002; Lopez, O’Byrne, & Petersen, 2003). For example, a student who intercedes on behalf of another student being harassed by a stranger would require moral courage, because the stranger may turn his aggression toward her. Another example is a student who learns that his advisor has been fabricating data and decides to file a report despite fear of retribution.

**Table 1. Kohlberg’s (1984) Stages of Ethical Reasoning Development**

Level	Stage
Preconventional	Stage 1 – Punishment Avoidance: Social expectations are not internalized and individuals adhere to rules only to avoid trouble.
	Stage 2 – Reward Pursuit: Social expectations are not internalized and individuals try to earn rewards for good behavior.
Conventional	Stage 3 – Conformity: Efforts to behave well are motivated by desire to maintain interpersonal relationships and obtain approval.
	Stage 4 – Authority: The desire to maintain interpersonal relationships expands to society as a whole and morality is conflated with following the rules, which are understood to be a means to maintaining social order.
Postconventional	Stage 5 – Social Contract: Morality is associated with ideas of mutual benefit, and individuals begin to distinguish between what may be morally right versus what is legal or illegal.
	Stage 6 – Universal Principles: The Golden Rule – mutual benefit is not as important as treating others the way one would want to be treated.

## Why Are Social/Civic Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning Important?

Scholars of civic engagement note, “Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions. Absent a reasoned commitment on the part of its citizens to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, a free and open society cannot succeed” (Branson & Quigley, 1998, p. 2). Alarming evidence suggests that there have been substantial declines in various indicators on all these dimensions over time. Among college students over the past 40 years, there have been precipitous drops in the extent to which they report discussing politics, view current events as important, and believe that change can be effectively catalyzed via political processes (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, & Tran, 2010). Longitudinal data also indicate that narcissism and materialism among college students have been steadily increasing over the past few decades, while empathy, perspective-taking, and the desire to develop meaning in one’s life have declined (Astin, 1993; Konrath, O’Brien, & Hsing, 2011; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). In 2008, a nationally-representative survey of civic knowledge found that the average score among college-educated individuals was 57% correct – only slightly higher than the general population and still well below what would be considered “passing” (Intercollegiate Studies Institute).

Similar trends are reflected in the general population. Political cynicism and apathy are pervasive. Congressional approval ratings have persistently hovered below 20% (Jones, 2015), and voting participation in congressional elections has continued to decline (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Polarization between political parties continues to increase (Pew Research Center, 2014), thoughtful deliberation has given way to incivility (National Institute for Civil Discourse, 2011; Weber Shandwick, 2013), and a corresponding erosion in individuals’ trust in government has continued (Gallup, 2016). On the same test of civic knowledge referenced above, researchers found an average score of 49% correct among all survey respondents. Perhaps more jarring is the finding that fewer than half of respondents could respond correctly to a question asking them to name the

three branches of government (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2008). In short, “The need for civic education is urgent because so many aspects of our civic life have become dysfunctional” (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012, p. 43).

Despite these negative patterns, there are signs of hope. For instance, the number of young people voting in presidential elections in the past three election years (2004, 2008, 2012) has increased substantially after bottoming out in the nineties (File, 2014). Furthermore, young adults today are significantly more likely than their predecessors to engage in community service (Erllich, 2000; Sax, 2014).

While there is clearly a case for developing social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning during the college years, this work has sometimes been framed as competing with “career development” skills. However, survey research finds that civic skills are highly desirable among employers (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Employers ranked ethical reasoning fourth most important among seventeen skills overall. Similarly, nearly all (94%) employers agree that employees should be able to “solve problems with people whose views are different from their own,” a vast majority (87%) agree that “students should gain an understanding of democratic institutions and values,” and a similarly large proportion (86%) report that they “should take courses that build the civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to our democratic society.”

## Developing Social/Civic Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning

*“Religion, morality and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”*

– Passage from the Northwest Ordinance inscribed on Angell Hall

Consistent with the broader goals of maintaining a flourishing democracy and ensuring that students have the skills to reason ethically and work effectively with others, the development of moral character and social/

civic responsibility has historically been the mission of universities in the United States (Reuben, 1996). Several methods of practice have been found to promote various dimensions of social/civic responsibility, including, but not limited to: 1) instruction to increase civic knowledge and skills, 2) discussion of current events and contentious issues, 3) participation in service learning, and 4) exposure to simulated or actual experience with democratic processes (Finley, 2011; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Nishishiba et al., 2005; O'Neill, 2012; Lagemann & Lewis, 2012; The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012). These methods need not be mutually exclusive. For instance, instruction to increase content and discussion of current events can take place in a service-learning course.

### ***Pedagogies for Developing Social/Civic Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning***

#### *Exposure to Content Knowledge*

Students may benefit from an introduction to (or refresher on) the basic functions of government and democratic participation. Although beyond the scope of this paper, several comprehensive resources detailing the roles of governmental entities and how to influence public policy are available on the Internet. For instance, the State of Michigan Legislature publishes *The Citizen's Guide to State Government* (Michigan Legislature, 2015). Likewise, the Women's Action for New Direction Education Fund has created a *Citizen's Guide to the Federal Government* (2006) and *Budget Process Basics* (2011), and Congress has developed an online video and supplemental material explaining the legislative process in detail (Congress.gov, n.d.). The benefit of using such resources is that they can easily be included as required or optional readings in almost any course to supplement engaged learning practices. Not only does this type of instruction increase civic knowledge, but it also leads to improved participatory civic skills and an increase in civic action (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002; Galston, 2001, 2004).

An example of exposure to content knowledge at the University of Michigan is the immersive, two-semester course *Introduction to Food Systems* taught by Catherine Badgley in ecology and evolutionary biology, and Ivette Perfecto in natural resources and the

environment. This course examines the complexities of the current food system, integrating political, economic, scientific, and historical perspectives with an emphasis on environmental and social justice. Lectures and readings in the course help students increase their civic knowledge by explicitly highlighting the issues and the federal and state policies that influence them. Field trips to different farms and food processing facilities locally and abroad further develop students' knowledge of the issues, and also give them a sense of the multiple perspectives and moral implications associated with the course topics.

#### *Discussion of Current Events and Contentious Issues*

Discussion of current events and contentious issues further develops students' civic knowledge by raising awareness and allowing them to explore issues in detail. Evidence also suggests that using current events as a framework for discussing basic civic knowledge increases students' interest and understanding (Niemi & Junn, 1998). At the University of Michigan, Kathleen Sienko, in mechanical and biomedical engineering, teaches a capstone engineering course that engages students in a real-world, global health design project. Students in the course design medical devices that address specific community needs in less developed countries. An important consideration in creating these designs is for students to understand how current events – including social, economic, and cultural issues – influence access to medical care in these locations. Past design examples have included a low-cost, low-tech blood pressure measurement device that can be more readily used by someone without extensive medical training. Another student-designed innovation is portable obstetrics and gynecology equipment that can allow medical workers to visit pregnant mothers, rather than requiring these mothers to travel long distances to see a doctor.

Discussion of contentious issues also focuses on real-world social and policy issues that can help illustrate generic civic knowledge with personally-relevant examples. Intergroup Dialogue and Deliberative Dialogue are two widely-used pedagogies that engage students around controversial subjects to improve relationships and increase interaction skills. While both pedagogies rely on multiple viewpoints to stimulate

discussion, Intergroup Dialogue, developed at U-M and housed in The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR), is more specifically focused on bringing together students who identify with racial, ethnic, or religious groups that have historically experienced conflict at the societal level (Alimo, 2012; Finley, 2011; Gurin-Sands, Gurin, Nagda, & Osuna, 2012; Krings, Austic, Gutiérrez, & Dirksen, 2015; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Zúñiga, Lopez, & Ford, 2012). In doing so, students from both majority and targeted groups, such as White and Black students or straight and gay students, come together in equal numbers to discuss relevant topics, such as racism and homophobia, with the help of trained student facilitators who represent each of the groups within the discussion section. In addition to developing civic knowledge, discussion of issues that involve multiple, competing viewpoints also develops students' civic skills. Discussions that incorporate effective listening, respectful deliberation, and critical analysis of information have been found to influence students' self-reported commitment to civic action (Branson & Quigley, 1998; Hess, 2009; Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Gurin-Sands, & Osuna, 2009; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004). Obtaining multiple perspectives also helps students develop a comprehensive value system and practice ethical reasoning skills when they must justify positions in which values are likely to come into conflict.

It can be challenging for instructors to facilitate a discussion that encompasses multiple, competing viewpoints. Discussions around sensitive topics can become heated and potentially unproductive, and so it is useful to be prepared with facilitation strategies that can steer the conversation in a fruitful direction. Strategies include setting “ground rules” for respectful and open discussion (e.g., telling students not to share names or content outside of class, encouraging students to ask questions of those with whom they disagree rather than focusing on defending their individual views with counterpoints, and having students argue for both sides of an issue), making sure all students' perspectives are heard, and being mindful of one's own identity. The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) has a comprehensive collection of online resources that more fully discuss these strategies: <http://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines>.

In addition, Linker (2011, 2014) developed an excellent four-step model for developing students' “intellectual empathy” to help further maintain open and civil discourse in the classroom, particularly when contention circles around issues associated with student identities. Instructors can teach students these steps, which are summarized below in Table 2, and ask that they adhere to the principles laid out by each during discussions.

**Table 2. Linker's (2011, 2014) Four-Step Model of Intellectual Empathy Development**

Step	Description
1. Start from the view point of <i>mutual compassion</i> .	Do not judge others or put labels on them such as “oppressor” or “oppressed.” Do not view individuals as spokespeople for their race, religion, gender, or other identities. Recognize the risk in sharing experiences and opinions, and be compassionate toward each other in light of these risks.
2. Recognize that privilege and disadvantage occur within a matrix of <i>intersecting identities</i> .	Individuals have multiple social identities that collectively influence their social privilege and disadvantage. Do not assume their level of privilege or disadvantage based on visible or salient identities.
3. Understand that <i>privilege is often not apparent</i> to those who have it.	Privileged individuals often take their privilege for granted, viewing it as “normal” and therefore they are often unaware of it. They likely have not considered that they benefit from their privilege.
4. Identify your own “maybe it's you” judgments of others, and use self-reflection to instead view these judgments as opportunities for gaining credible information.	There is a propensity to dismiss individuals' personal experiences as evidence of broader systematic issues, instead implying that it is something specific to that person or situation. Recognize this common form of skepticism and reflect on why it may be difficult to believe or accept this experience as evidence for broader systematic issues.

### *Service Learning & Reflection*

Service learning is the integration of community service into academic coursework (Engberg & Fox, 2011; Finley, 2011; Kendall, 1990; The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012; Nishishiba et al., 2005). What distinguishes service learning from general volunteerism is the explicit inclusion of academic lessons that correspond to the experiential learning that takes place in the community (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jay, 2008; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Myers-Lipton, 1998). Research suggests that an important element of this academic instruction is the opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences and connect them to the content of the course (Battistoni, 2000; Bowen, 2010; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Reflection has been described as “a process of contemplation with an openness to being changed, a willingness to learn, and a sense of responsibility for doing one’s best” (Jay, 2003, p. 1). Reflection is often accomplished in written form so that students have time to gather their thoughts and mull over ideas, many of which are catalyzed by specific prompts. For example, “At your service site, what are you learning about the people or agency you are serving? How does this learning compare to what you have learned in class?” (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). Collectively, these practices mirror those described in Kolb’s (2015) *experiential learning model*, in which students cycle through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Similarly, Ash and Clayton’s (2009) DEAL framework for reflection asks students to 1) Describe their experience, 2) Examine it in relation to learning goals, and 3) Articulate Learning through prompts such as “What did I learn?” “How did I learn it?” “Why does it matter?” and “What will I do in light of it?” These prompts are often simplified into “What?” “So what?” and “Now what?” (Manarin, Carey, Rathburn, & Ryland, 2015). In addition to developing knowledge, skills, and values, service learning allows students to be civically active in tandem with development of the other three civic capacities (Myers-Lipton, 1998; O’Neill, 2012).

An excellent example of this process is the Stamps School of Art and Design *Change by Design* course taught by Nick Tobier. Students learn design principles in the context of social entrepreneurship, focusing on the needs of those living in economically disadvantaged communities. More specifically, they work with underprivileged students in northwest Detroit schools on a weekly basis and connect what they are learning in the community to classroom lectures and assigned readings. Much of this connection is developed through student reflection. For instance, Tobier poses the following questions: “Look at your learning spaces with 21st-century eyes: Do they work for what we know about learning today, or just for what we knew about learning in the past? Look at the classrooms at Bennett Elementary and ask the same questions.” In responding to these questions, U-M students are prompted to reflect on the school environment and implications it has for children’s learning. The class culminates in a final project that includes product development and a community business plan. As an example, a recent semester-long project focused on the development of portable water-purification systems for neighborhoods in which access to clean water was limited.

While service learning can be a powerful pedagogical tool, it is important for instructors to be mindful of considerations such as fostering a reciprocal relationship with the community in which service learning will be taking place (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, 2002; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996), and ensuring that students receive adequate orientation and preparation prior to engaging in the community (e.g., see Goodman, 2010). Resources for service learning on campus include the Ginsberg Center for Community Service & Learning and the Center for Engaged Academic Learning (CEAL).

### *Simulated or Actual Experience with Democratic Processes*

Examples of simulations include having students participate in mock congressional hearings, writing letters to representatives, or developing legislative proposals regarding a policy issue of relevance (e.g., Bernstein & Meizlish, 2003). At the University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy, Liz Gerber leads a three-day policy simulation known as the

Integrated Policy Exercise. Participating students represent various viewpoints (e.g., an elected official, an advocacy group) on a selected topic and develop political strategies aimed at furthering their policy goals. The exercise concludes with a mock negotiation process that engages the various groups in conjunction with feedback from experts in the field. Examples of actual experience within the political realm can also include writing letters to representatives, participating in a protest or strike, attending school board or city council meetings, or voting in elections.

Within a non-political realm, two approaches are commonly cited within the literature. The first, Collective Civic Problem Solving, emerged as a form of democratic engagement in which students and faculty work with a community to address specific problems in a collaborative and time-limited way (The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). An example of collective civic problem solving at U-M is a cross-disciplinary program known as Michigan Engaging Community through the Classroom (MECC). This program brings together students from engineering, public health, public policy, and urban planning to work with community stakeholders on an issue over the course of a semester. For instance, a recent project included a redevelopment plan for Willow Run Airport. The second approach, Participatory Action Research (PAR; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007), is an increasingly popular subtype of collective civic problem solving that specifically includes the collection and analysis of data to inform plans for community solutions. There is little research on student learning outcomes within this category of pedagogies making it ripe for evaluation (The National Task Force on Civic Learning, 2012).

### *Developing Ethical Reasoning and Moral Courage*

Discussion of ethical issues alone does not necessarily develop a student’s ability to reason effectively. Psychological research on the influences of moral judgment suggests that individuals tend to depend on intuition and often cannot articulate a well-reasoned argument when asked for justification (Haidt, 2001).

To help students develop their ethical reasoning skills, it is important to make them aware of common biases that interfere with critical thinking, encourage them to formulate opinions after they have received information, and keep them open to changing their opinion when they are presented with new information. Likewise, students should learn how to critically analyze others’ arguments and be able to discern the relative credibility of different sources of information. Finally, they should learn how to support their arguments with evidence (i.e., factual information) and offer rationales for their opinions in the context of the overarching ethical standards to which they adhere.

Students may struggle with identifying a reasoned and cohesive set of ethical standards on which to base their judgments. As such, they may benefit from a brief introduction (or review) of common sources of ethical standards. Philosophers generally outline three broad approaches on which to base one’s ethical standards, which are summarized in Table 3 (Zalta, 2015).

Even when students have well-developed ethical reasoning skills, these skills may not translate into ethical behavior – particularly in stressful situations in which ethical behavior may result in high costs (e.g., losing a job for reporting unethical behavior; Christensen, Barnes, & Rees, 2007). To illustrate, during a 2016 TLTC meeting in which U-M faculty and

**Table 3. Philosophical Approaches to Ethics**

Philosophical Approach	Description
Consequentialism	Actions are to be judged morally “right” based on their consequences. It is outcome based. “The good is prior to the right.”
Deontology	Actions are to be judged morally “right” based on whether they comply with certain norms that do not themselves have a consequentialist justification. It is duty and rule based. “The right is prior to the good.”
Virtue Ethics	Focus is not on actions but development of personal character. “What kind of person ought I strive to be?”

**Table 4: Sternberg’s (2012b) Eight Steps for Ethical Behavior**

1) Recognizing that there is an event to which to react
2) Defining the event as having an ethical dilemma
3) Deciding that the ethical dimension is of sufficient significance to merit an ethics-guided response
4) Taking responsibility for generating an ethical solution to the problem
5) Figuring out what abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem
6) Deciding how these abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem so as to suggest a concrete solution
7) Preparing for possible repercussions of having acted in what one considers an ethical manner
8) Acting

staff were asked to give feedback on how the university can foster and assess social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning, one faculty member noted, “Most of the decisions we come to think of as wrong were made by organizations whose members are mostly ethical individuals and decent members of their communities. But the roles they hold in their jobs too often call for them to check their ethics at the door, to worry about their organization’s mission and bottom line, and to make them feel uncomfortable—and a bit traitorous—if they buck the pack in their workplace.” In short, the capacity to reason ethically does not by itself ensure that ethical behavior will follow, particularly in contexts where acting ethically may come with high costs.

Therefore, in addition to teaching students how to reason effectively, instructors must be attuned to developing students’ resolve to have moral courage in difficult situations. In order to foster ethical behavior and ensure that it is maintained over time, instructors can 1) explicitly teach the steps of ethical reasoning to students (see Table 4), 2) use case studies or other methods that give students practice in applying abstract moral principles to actual ethically complex issues, and 3) teach students about ethical drift, or the propensity for individuals to slowly and unknowingly lose their moral compass under certain circumstances (Sternberg, 2012a, 2012b).

To develop students’ moral courage, it is useful to use real case studies and role play exercises. These help students practice responses to difficult scenarios and to react more quickly and confidently when and if they encounter such situations later in life (Christensen et al., 2007; Sternberg, 2012b).

### **Assessing Social/Civic Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning**

How can student development in social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning be assessed at U-M? How can we align key learning outcomes with one or more of the four dimensions of social/civic responsibility (knowledge, skills, values, action)? This section highlights some established measures of social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning. For additional assistance developing an assessment plan, please see this web resource: <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/assessment/planning> or contact [crltassessment@umich.edu](mailto:crltassessment@umich.edu) for a tailored consultation.

#### ***Social/Civic Responsibility Measures***

Assessment of social/civic responsibility can include direct or indirect approaches to measuring student learning (Maki, 2004). Table 5 highlights some examples of both approaches, along with a description of the dimension of social/civic responsibility they measure. While most are free and easily accessible online, the Defining Issues Test must be purchased.

At U-M, the Michigan Engaging Community through the Classroom (MECC) project is currently using the Problem-Solving Analysis Protocol (P-SAP; Steinke & Fitch, 2007), which is designed to ascertain the extent to which students understand complex issues from a systems perspective – a learning goal aligned with the dimension of civic knowledge. This protocol requires instructors to draft an issue/problem statement that is particular to their class or lesson, which students reference in responding to four standardized questions (“In what ways might this be a problem?” “What are some possible causes of this problem?” “What could be done to try to solve this problem?” “What are the

**Table 5. Examples of Measures**

Instrument	Dimension	Notes	Measure Type
Critical and Integrative Thinking Rubric (Washington State University, 2009)	Knowledge and Skills	7-item rubric for coding written work on a 6-point scale using evidence of critical and integrative thinking.	Direct
Problem-Solving Analysis Protocol (P-SAP; Steinke & Fitch, 2007)	Knowledge and Skills	Students answer a standardized four-question protocol in response to a researcher-generated issue. Responses are coded on two dimensions of problem-solving: locus and complexity. Locus is two items and uses a 7-point scale based on the extent to which the problem is defined to be individual or global. Complexity is two items and uses a 4-point scale to assess the number of problems and degree of elaboration in explaining them.	Direct
Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest, 1979)	Ethical Reasoning	5 vignettes of ethical dilemmas, each with 12 items of various relevant considerations for indicating degree of importance on a 5-point response scale. It exhibits acceptable reliability and validity.	Direct
Concept Map Coding (Hay, Wells, & Kinchin, 2008)	Knowledge	For assessment of systemic understanding of complex problems, count the quantity of correctly identified components and links between them.	Direct
Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ; Moely, Mercer, Ilustre, Miron, & McFarland, 2002)	Multidimensional	65-item self-report scale regarding students' self-reported civic skills, attitudes and action plans. It exhibits acceptable reliability and validity.	Indirect
Social Responsibility Scale (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964)	Values	22-item self-report scale regarding students attitudes about responsibility to others. It exhibits acceptable validity.	Indirect
Woodard-Pury Courage Scale – Social Subscale (WPCS-31; Woodard & Pury, 2007)	Moral Courage	23-item self-report scale regarding willingness to engage in various threatening/costly behaviors to benefit others. It exhibits acceptable reliability and validity.	Indirect

**Direct measures** are associated with student work and represent actual student learning. Direct assessment measures can be further categorized into authentic measures or other direct measures. Authentic measures demonstrate classroom learning via performance on open-ended tasks for real stakeholders, such as giving a presentation of a politically feasible solution to community members (Wiggins, 2014). Other types of direct measures demonstrate learning via performance, such as taking a quiz testing civic engagement content knowledge. While authentic measures provide a richer understanding of student learning and its applicability to the real world, they can be more time intensive and costly to quantify for purposes of student comparisons. Conversely, other direct measures can be standardized and easily quantifiable, but may fail to tap into the extent to which students are able to apply what they have learned, especially for the unscripted nature of engaged learning. **Indirect measures** are associated with students' attitudes, opinions or reported learning, such as survey questions that ask if they agree with statements related to social/civic responsibility. The advantages of using indirect measures are that they are comparatively easy to administer and they may help identify the extent to which motivational intentions precede performance or behavior. The disadvantage is that intentions may fail to culminate in increased performance or changed behaviors, which may lead to inflated estimates of actual outcomes. The use of both direct and indirect measures is recommended for the best understanding of student learning and experiences.

strengths and limitations of these possible solutions to this problem?”). Student responses are then coded along two dimensions of problem solving – the extent to which they define the problem as global versus individual, and complexity (number and degree of elaboration) of the responses.

With a similar emphasis on systems thinking, Catherine Badgley and Ivette Perfecto assessed student civic knowledge increases in their food systems course by administering a concept map assignment at the beginning of the course and again at the end. The maps were meant to represent both the key components of the overall food systems, as well as the links between the components. Analysis of the quantity of components as well as the accurate identification of links between them indicated increases in both across time, demonstrating student gains in civic knowledge about this complex issue.

### **Conclusion**

The development of students’ social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning is an important goal of a college education because a robust democracy depends on citizens who can exercise these skills. At the University of Michigan, results from the 2015 UMAP survey (N ≈ 5,000), conducted by the Office of Budget and Planning, give insight into how some dimensions of social/civic responsibility may benefit from further development.

For instance, almost half of respondents indicated that they do not engage in any type of community service or volunteer activities. Furthermore, although more than three-quarters of respondents report that their ability to thoughtfully consider perspectives different from their own has increased during their time at U-M, it appears that opportunities to be exposed to such perspectives are comparatively scarce. Only about a third of students

stated that they “often” gained a deeper understanding of other perspectives through conversations with students whose political opinions or religions were different from their own. Similarly, fewer than half of respondents stated that they had “often” gained a deeper understanding of other perspectives through conversations with students whose race or ethnicity differed from their own. In conjunction with research indicating that the frequency of engaging in such practices influences the extent to which such skills are developed and maintained (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010; Eyster, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Hurtado, 2009), it appears that students may benefit from more opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers who hold perspectives different from their own, crossing religious, racial, ethnic, and political boundaries.

In order to foster social/civic responsibility and ethical reasoning, it is important to recognize the many components of this overarching learning goal. As seen in the examples described above, instructors can use a range of pedagogical strategies to approach this broader goal, depending on the specific content and context of their courses. By thinking carefully about assessment as well as pedagogy, faculty can contribute to the ongoing national conversation about the most effective approaches to fostering learning outcomes that are congruent with ethical reasoning and social/civic engagement.

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