Cultivating College Students’ Civic Character in the University Setting

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How do you define civic character at your institution?

Jamboard
Overview

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- Overview of Tisch Programs
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- Discussion Time

Pictured: Kyrielle Lord, E24, Environmental Engineering at Mystic River Watershed Association (Medford)
Civic Character

- The word “civic” describes anything that helps people to act effectively together and accomplish self-governance (Hyun et al., 2024)

- “Civic Character” can be described as the set of dispositions and skills that motivate and enable an individual to effectively and responsibly participate in the public sphere to serve the common good (Berkowitz et al., 2008)
Mission:

To prepare students for a lifetime of engagement in civic and democratic life, to study civic life and its intersections with public and private institutions, and to promote practices that strengthen civic life in the United States and around the world.
Tisch College Student Programs’ Evaluation & Assessment Framework

Institutional Inclusive Excellence

Agency
- [structural]
  Address structural challenges and opportunities in society, including systemic inequities and root causes of social issues to promote positive social change

Leadership
- [interpersonal]
  Cultivate collaborative relationships to communicate effectively and work with diverse groups of people toward collective goals for the common good

Identity
- [intrapersonal]
  Enhance sense of self, efficacy and purpose as a responsible and engaged citizen of the world

IMPACT
Tisch North Star: Building robust, inclusive democracy for an increasingly multiracial society

Knowledge
Values
Skills and Behaviors
Positive Growth
Attitudes
## Example Outcomes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Civic Identity</th>
<th>Civic Leadership</th>
<th>Civic Agency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td>• Develops personal value set to guide actions</td>
<td>• Appreciates diverse perspectives and experiences to inform collective actions</td>
<td>• Utilizes principles of social justice and equity in policy formulation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>• Recalls concepts, information and theories essential for human rights, justice and equality</td>
<td>• Identifies motives underlying individual actions.</td>
<td>• Applies civic knowledge to build just and equitable organizations</td>
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<td>• Applies scientific evidence, research and facts to influence individuals</td>
<td>• Identify differences and commonalities among stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills &amp; Behaviors</strong></td>
<td>• Thinks creatively to generate effective strategies that are just and equitable</td>
<td>• Effectively communicates ideas and concepts to others</td>
<td>• Evaluates change strategies against stated goals and objectives</td>
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<td>• Articulates a clear and compelling vision for civic engagement work</td>
<td>• Builds coalitions across groups</td>
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Overview of Tisch Programs

CULTIVATING COLLEGE STUDENTS’ CIVIC CHARACTER
Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life

Tisch College works with students across the University – between schools and on their journey to becoming active citizens.

Our courses, internships, and programs provide transformational learning experiences that inform how you view yourself and the world, shape your future, and enable you to become effective agents of change. We believe that all students should graduate from Tufts University prepared to contribute to civic life as informed, ethical, and engaged citizens, regardless of academic majors or career aspirations.

There is a pathway for you at Tisch College.
Selective Programs Designed to Foster Students’ Character Development

- Leadership for Social Change
- Civic Semester
- Civic Studies
- Tisch Scholars
- Tisch Summer Fellows
Leadership for Social Change

As a high school student, you can participate in an engaging and enriching two-week summer experience with Leadership for Social Change. With a lens toward advancing equity, inclusion, and participation in civic life, the program will equip you with the civic skills and knowledge to build connections, work collaboratively, and emerge as change agents who can inspire others.

Eligibility: High School/Pre-College
Application Period: Spring

Student Reflection

"This program was so enriching! The faculty lectures opened my eyes to many topics that I had either not considered before or that I did not have a complete understanding of. I loved getting to hear a variety of perspectives...

Also, the support from Tisch faculty, my peer leader and my TA was so helpful and amazing!"
Tufts Civic Semester

Spend your first semester off-campus with Tufts Civic Semester, a transformational program that combines academic and experiential learning with a focus on community engagement and social and environmental justice. With programming focused on building a civic identity and civic skills for promoting equity and justice, you will return to campus with a network of deep friendships, a stronger sense of self, and a clearer understanding of how you want to have an impact during your time at Tufts and beyond.

Eligibility: First-year Students
Application Period: Spring

Alumni Spotlight

"DO THIS. So many times we want to do amazing, impactful things but we don't for one reason or another. I've found a great community here, and I had the opportunity to do and learn so many things. I was worried with this being the first year that I was taking a big risk with participating, but I am so happy I did."

Scan the QR Code or contact Jessye Crowe-Rothstein at jessica.crowe_rothstein@tufts.edu to learn more.
Civic Studies

Civic Studies is an academic exploration into movements to improve societies and create pathways for change. The process of change-making requires you — along with your communities, neighborhoods, friends, relatives, classmates, and others — to ask, “What should we do?” Those four words raise questions of individual and group identity, of shared and divergent values and norms for discourse, of relationship-and trust-building, of strategies for collective action, and more.

A One-of-a-Kind Program

Civic Studies courses center around four tracks:

Thinking About Justice
Social Conflict, Inequality, and Violence
Civic Action and Social Movements
Civic Skills

The Civic Studies program also supports minors in Peace and Justice Studies and Entrepreneurship for Social Impact.

Eligibility: Undergraduate Students
Application Period: Course Enrollment

Scan the QR Code or contact Sam Fried at samantha.fried@tufts.edu to learn more.
The Tisch Scholar program is a multi-year curricular leadership development program. As a Tisch Scholar, you will work alongside a community partner organization to address social justice issues. You'll learn about an array of approaches to change-making and engage in critical reflection that will support your understanding of yourself and what is needed to improve society. You will do all of this while building and nurturing your community of Tisch Scholars.

Eligibility: Rising sophomores and juniors
Application Period: Early spring semester

Scan the QR Code to learn more!
Tisch Summer Fellows

As a Tisch Summer Fellow, you will gain career and professional competencies while enhancing the knowledge, skills and behaviors needed to make positive social change. Tisch Summer Fellows engage in an internship with a public, non-profit, or advocacy organization, build a network of alumni and other professionals, and connect with peers for intentional reflection to make the most of the summer experience.

Fellowship Opportunities

Haley House (Boston)
Boston Healthcare for the Homeless
The Asia Foundation (DC)
United States Department of Agriculture
Wildlife Conservation Society: Bronx Zoo
and more!

Eligibility: All Tufts Students
Application Period: January

Scan the QR Code or contact Jenna Logue at jenna.logue@tufts.edu to learn more.
How do you currently cultivate students’ civic character at your institution?
Assessment of Impact
TISCH SCHOLARS AND LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL CHANGE PROGRAMS
Tisch Scholars Evaluation Timeline

A Multi-Year Mixed Methods Study

Phase 1:
- 2023 Fall: Pre-Survey
- 2024 April/May: First Year Reflections & Survey
- 2025 Spring: Second Year Reflections & Survey

Phase 2:
- 2025 Late Fall: Focus Group Interviews
- 2026 Spring: Final Survey

Sophomore: Control Group Data
Junior: Repeated Measure
Senior: Repeated Measure
During their first year

- **25.0%** Students actively pursue opportunities to develop skills that help civic engagement.
- **26.6%** Students are confident in their ability to contribute to social organizations.
- **60.0%** Students know how to build coalitions and strategies with different individuals, institutions, and other stakeholders.
- **54.2%** Students are knowledgeable on utilizing different approaches to addressing social issues.

Pre vs. Post
Through evaluation, we also learned

For example,

- 31.3% of students mentioned that they socialized with people who had different beliefs (from 25%)
- 6.3% of students mentioned that they had guarded interactions with people from different backgrounds (from 0%)
- 56.3% of students mentioned that they had meaningful discussions about race/ethnic relations with people from different backgrounds (from 58.3%)
I realized that understanding the dynamics of power, mapping privilege, and tackling society’s relevant issues represent the true values of a college degree.

I am continuously challenged to think about my identity, my privileges, and my space in this world when I walk into the scholars' space.

As a woman of color, it is really hard to express my beliefs in a political science atmosphere ...but I am learning to take up the space I rightfully deserve.

I definitely want a future where the work I do is not benefiting structures that have historically harmed my and other spaces but really working in a space that helps contribute to the changes that need to be made in this society.
Leadership for Social Change

After a two-week program, 100% of students agreed that “by working with others in the community, I can help make things better” and believed being involved in community issues was their responsibility.

This high post-programmatic civic agency trend remained consistent for five consecutive years.
After the program

- I have a deep understanding of the intersectionality of power and privilege when engaging with others: Pre 21.0% Post 44.7%
- I am able to organize a meeting to bring community members together: Pre 13.1% Post 13.0%
- I enjoy working with people who have different experiences from mine: Pre 13.1% Post 13.0%
- I believe I can make a difference in my community: Pre 13.0% Post 13.0%

Tufts University
Jonathan M. Tisch
College of Civic Life
Some of the most useful skills I received from the LSC program were researching and presenting. Additionally, gaining the knowledge of the power of speech and community were especially important. Currently, my work surrounding heavily on my local multilingual learner community on education equity. As a result of having the experiences of this program, I am now able to quickly research the issues and current solutions that put in place. Additionally, my presentations are now more concise while being very informative.”
One Year Later

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- “I think the most useful skills that I gained from the LSC program were understanding the importance of listening to different perspectives and being able to have a conversation with someone who you may not agree with. The only way to make change is to understand everyone and realize that everyone, no matter what they believe, deserves to be listened to and heard. Today, I still think about how important is to be respectful to everyone and fight for what you believe in.”
Future Steps

• Validate civic character (civic identity, civic leadership, and civic agency) and community impact measures
  • This will help to provide a more comprehensive view of how colleges/universities can more effectively build civic character not only within their student bodies but also within their surrounding communities
• Pursue a longitudinal study of civic-related programming to explore developmental “civic pathways” or trajectories of students’ civic character development
Food for Thought

- How are you currently assessing civic character at your institution?
- What frameworks have you found useful for evaluation?