Remedial Civics Education at Rutgers University

A study of the lack of remedial civics knowledge by the average Rutgers student and how that compares to the knowledge required by the Federal Department for every citizen

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Summary

Knowledge of civics is necessary for navigating through the political sphere that permeates throughout everyday life. From education to the economy, all things are in some way affected by politics and thus a working knowledge of civics is helpful for anyone hoping to affect change. Previous surveys have shown that American youths lack specific civics knowledge, in addition to this, the knowledge base apparently declines as people get older. Thus although people may know more about a specific topic, they have a narrower scope of expertise with general civics. On the other hand immigrants hoping to gain citizenship are required to have a working knowledge on a vast array of civics topics. We believe that the lack of knowledge also holds true for Rutgers students and hope to gather data to show just that. We will be giving a random sampling of student 10-20 questions from the official Citizenship Test to see how Rutgers students score compared to non-nationals. From there we will take measures to ensure that awareness is raised about this issue and that it is corrected in the student body.

(OI)

YouTube link:
http://youtu.be/BLvABoHMO_o

Introduction

(WM) As a part of civic knowledge, history serves its important role by telling us about our society and its people. Winston Churchill once said: “Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it.” While our nation has a relatively short history in comparison to some of the ancient countries like India, Egypt and China, it is certainly worth for anyone to explore its excitement and meaningfulness. History, in my opinion,
is a storehouse of valuable information that offers its studier’s opportunities to unveil, track and investigate the past of their society in which they reside as well as to understand the operations of people and how they and their ancestors interact. History tells us who we are, how we have achieved to where we are today and, more importantly, if we are heading to the right direction. Just like E.H. Carr has said to us: “History is a never-ending dialogue between the past, present and future.” Indeed, history loves to repeat itself in life. So besides leading us onto a wiser path by avoiding making similar mistakes that have occurred in the past and taking advantages of the legacies that are passed down from our ancestors, learning history helps us draw a blueprint for our bright future and identify who we really are. It contributes to moral understanding and improvement by building the foundation for good citizenship, it grants us the ability of critical thinking, formulating arguments and analyzing evidence to pave our present road to a better tomorrow by acting on behalf of ourselves and the communal interests.

Likewise, it is crucial for an answerable American to stay politically aware and active, since it is a manner of which one can become involved in a fascinating career and make enormous impact on others or, at least, understand how our government works and how their policies can affect us on a day-to-day basis. Although these points seem adequately evident, one would be surprised that how little today’s American youths know about politics and how indifferent they are to political activities. To many of the young generation, politics is just for people who want to work for the government one day or become a professor in the related areas. My personal experience tells me that if the front page of the Daily Targum, for instance, does not have anything breaking or entertaining like Rutgers became bowl eligible, Eric LeGrand showed up in the game against West Virginia, Steve Jobs has died, or Macy’s Santa is visiting Rutgers, but merely news like a legislative act is being intensely debated in the Congress or the state is trying to pass a new bill, these “dry and nonchalant” materials will make the readers that could not care less about politics automatically turn to the next page or jump straight to crossword puzzles or the cartoon section. This phenomenon is so prevalent that I see it almost every day and it frankly bothers me. Even the death of Tyler Clementi raised limited attention and participation to address the real issues behind the tragedy as many would only wait until something sad or unexpected happens to start accusing the school for its imperfective regulations without ever thought about getting involved and strive for a change on their own. Many often think that, on the larger scale, politics tends to serve the governors and company workers who have the powers to make new laws or operate business to gain profits; on the smaller scale, many believe politics is only for the smart, outgoing and talented ones who hold office positions in university organizations. These concepts are far from true. The knowledge of politics has intimate linkage with every person in the society and can factually be used every day: from purchasing to selling, from insurance to lawsuit, from personal income to investment, or just as topics for friends and families to talk about at the dinner table. Politics may sound abstract and somewhat broad, but its implementations are everywhere and its regulations have impacts on every aspect of our life. Hence, it is essential for all American citizens to become politically aware and active. No matter it is because voting for the president, organizing a group or company, calculating your
personal taxes or serving on a jury, understanding politics and its language can aid us to live and work better, to be able to interact with others on an elevated and reciprocally educational level, and, of course, becoming more familiar with various types of government regulations and edicts does our own good by making us better-informed and responsible social members.

(OI) Knowledge of civics is necessary for navigating through the political sphere that permeates throughout everyday life. From education to the economy, all things are in some way affected by politics and thus a working knowledge of civics is helpful for anyone hoping to affect change. It has recently been shown that more people have been taking a more active role in political engagement as compared to 50 years ago. In addition to this, research has also shown that the more highly educated a person is, the more likely that person is to have civic engagement. Unfortunately, recent surveys have also shown that, as compared to 50 years ago, there has been no significant increase in knowledge about politics. In fact it could be said that there has been a decrease, because it was shown that our college students have the same approximate knowledge base as high school students in the 1950s. With a proper civics education being as important as it is, and the strides in the overall education of the average citizen being so much higher than the past, it is a wonder as to why and how such results could have come about.

(WM) It is unfortunate today, however, that the significance of knowing the past of our country and its systems is desolated by numerous other cultures brought by TV shows, sports, online social networking and video games in America, a country that is established upon myriad of amazing and memorable historical events and plays one of the most influential political roles in the world. I, as a college student and an American, believe that it is imperative and necessitous to remedy our young generation’s interest of learning civics, simply because they are the future of our country and their understanding, appreciation of America’s history and participation in political events will influence them at multiple aspects in life and make our country stronger and healthier. I am not advocating everyone to become an expert in the field, yet I consider being familiar with the history of our home and serving her as a well-informed voter to be essential for every citizen, since the current situation in which how badly American youths are failing in knowing the very fundamental history and political knowledge of our country seems to be more than appalling. And this is the reason that I am conducting my service project in hope to uncover, examine and amend this situation.

Causes of the Remedial Nature of Civics Education

(OI) In 1999, a study released by the government showed that of students from the grades of K-12 only 25% of the children gained a competent score on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Report Card in Civics, a test of how well students are prepared for the citizenship roles required of them. The latest retesting, released in 2010, shows a declining competency with the percentage of proficient students ranging between 22% and 27% amongst the grade levels tested. Although one could question the validity of this test, no increases in the found percentages have been noted when various other tests have been given to students from any age group and any
background. Summaries and reviews performed by external parties have seemed to outline the same four areas, in addition to a few adapted to explain college students, which directly cause the lack of civics proficiency:

- **Policy: non-existent, inadequate, or counterproductive**
- A lack of preparation by professors
- Curricular disparity caused by a focus on STEM courses
- An inadequate set of curricular requirements

*Italic text taken from: http://www.cms-ca.org/disengagement_and_lack.pdf

NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for the Nation
The Nation's Report Card: Civics 2010

**Policy: non-existent, inadequate, or counterproductive**

(01) Perhaps the most important factor in determining whether or not a subject topic is taught adequately, or even at all, is the policy surrounding that topic. For instance, all states have some form of educational standards of learning which outline what an educational institution needs to convey to its students in order to give them a proficient knowledge base in the subject material. However, the standard of learning for civics is not only overly general in what it requires, when it is specific it puts a greater emphasis on a student’s working knowledge of history than civics education.

For the state of NJ, the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) in the Social Sciences, there is no specific area for civics, is broken down into three sections: US History, World History, and then Active Citizenship in the 21st Century. While the title, “Active Citizenship in the 21st Century”, may convey that it enforces a requirement for a deep understanding of politics, government, the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, and integrated civics, all topics of required knowledge on the Naturalization Test, the general theme of the section is to teach diversity and promote cultural understanding. It is not until you come to the required material by the end of the 12th grade that the standards even touch upon something specifically related to the requirements of a citizen. Despite the worthiness of this effort, it is the opinion of the author that time would be better spent actually teaching students the topics covered on the Naturalization Test, a discussion of which would integrate conversation about diversity and cultural understanding. Under a small sub-section entitled, Civics, Government, and Human Rights” the standards finally ask for civic engagement at a level that had not previously been required and which also involves material not previously taught, thus leading a teacher attempting to follow the guidelines with the dilemma of either having to “go back to the basics” or simply skip over that small sub-section entirely.

This then brings us to the fact that civics education only accounts for one-third of the requirement for the CCCS Social Studies division and even then is so broad that generally talking about being a good person could warrant gaining a proficient score as defined by those standards. It thus comes as no surprise that of the 590 school districts
in NJ only 39% of the districts have a required course specifically geared towards civics education. With the policy being highly generalized and with no true enforcement of the policy, one wonders how much further civics education needs to decline before someone will take notice and do something.

Core Curriculum Content Standards (Social Studies):
http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/standards/6/index.html
Civics (History and Government) Questions for the Naturalization Test
http://cdn.co.douglas.nv.us/Elections/US100q.pdf
NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACT SHEET
http://www.nj.gov/education/data/fact.htm
The Civic Mission of our Nation’s School
http://www.cms-ca.org/disengagement_and_lack.pdf
POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT, AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Lack of preparation: The inadequacy of educational staff

(01) After reviewing the lack of a defined and clear policy surrounding the issue of civics education, the reason for the inadequate preparation of teachers and professors, in teaching civics, is clear. But first, the issue itself must be examined as a factor related to the remedial nature of civics education. In NJ, of the 108,591 full-time teachers, only ~35% of them have ever been equipped with the information necessary to properly teach a course specifically on, or related to, civics. When this related to American citizens enrolled in a university, in the basic level courses in which a civics knowledge or background is required, many professors do not recognize that their students, most of whom came through the lacking US school system, lack the basic knowledge required to contribute effectively to a civics discussion. These professors are more likely to concern themselves with the theoretical or existential discussion of civics, or more specific political discussion, thus allowing the ignorance to continue on.

On the other hand, there are those professors who do recognize that their students lack a solid understanding of civics but cannot do anything about it as a result of time/course constraints. This was noted in a Daily Targum article, entitled “Know Your Own Ignorance” published on September 15th, 2011, in which a student complained about professors allowing ignorance to continue. The specific example the student used was that of a classmate who although seemingly intelligent was either misinformed or lacked the fundamental base of knowledge about politics, Communism in particular, but still insisted on forming an opinion and defending said opinion. The professor in the course indulged her ignorance in an effort to continue discussion and not divert too much from class time. Although the assumed intent of the article’s author was to raise awareness about personal ignorance about certain topics, the article touches on the much larger issue that many people are ignorant about civics and even the professors who should be able to correct such ignorance cannot do so because it is out of the scope of their course topic and would probably take a lot longer than one class period to correct years of opinion based on ignorance.

The inadequacy of teachers and professors in dealing with the lack civics education is not entirely their fault. The fact still remains that it is the administration
who dictates how much time is spent doing what. If the policy does not mandate civics education, and the administration does not offer a way for teachers/professors who wish to teach civics to learn how to convey their message, ignorance about civics will continue to persevere.

Know Your Own Ignorance

Daily Targum Opinions: September 15th, 2011
NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACT SHEET
http://www.nj.gov/education/data/fact.htm
The Civic Mission of our Nation’s School
http://www.cms-ca.org/disengagement_and_lack.pdf

**Curricular Disparity: A Focus on Math, Science, and Reading**

OI There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the acceptance of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act which stipulates the requirements for every school in educating its students properly. Most of the controversy surrounds the detail that the Act places more of an emphasis on measured success in test scores and thus causes schools to focus heavily on passing students than actually teaching them. This practice has in fact lead to many more students actually being “left behind” by schools attempting to boost scores or by those schools who do not perform well and are thus forced to close down. Unfortunately, no thought has been given to the point that the NCLB Act completely ignores civics education.

With this heightened emphasis on math, science, and reading, civics education, which had already been suffering was put even further on the “back-burner” or neglected completely. Add to this the circumstance that state assessments for student proficiency only focus on math, science, and reading and the Core Curriculum Content Standards referred to previously have individual websites devoted to math and reading, but only 1 PDF file for social studies and it is no wonder that students are lacking in civics education. Such oversight does not only cover the K-12 levels but even the university levels as well. From the SAT’s to the GRE’s and everything in between, any focus that may have been on civics is lost once an individual considers and enters higher education. When specifically reviewing the mission statements of Rutgers University and many other institutions, the focuses are frighteningly similar: research, instruct, service, advance, liberate, integrate, and teach; many buzz-words, none of which make any reference to preparing someone to be a proper and functioning citizen with the civics knowledge required of all citizens.

Compounded upon everything is the fact that once an individual enters the workforce, there is absolutely no requirement for any type of civics knowledge in most, arguably all, forms of employment one could take in life. With nothing motivating a person to either attain or maintain a functional knowledge of civics, the surveys supporting a decline in overall knowledge of civics as individuals age makes sense. People will focus on learning the causes that are important to them, to the exclusion of all else. A lack of instruction and reinforcement throughout all stages of life from K-post-graduate is very concerning because if no emphasis is placed on learning about civics at any point in life, civics education will continue to be remedial. No one will
concern themselves with how civics affects their lives because they can probably not even recognize issues that have a root in civics.

The Civic Mission of our Nation’s School
http://www.cms.ca.org/disengagement_and_lack.pdf
Core Curriculum Content Standards
http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/

**An Inadequate Set of Curricular Requirements**

(01) Finally, contributing to the curricular disparity and in part caused by the lack of clear policy, a severely inadequate set of curricular requirements related to civics is perhaps the largest hindrance to civics education. Most importantly, as compared to the past in which there was at least some near equal focus on civics and history in courses, as mentioned before there is little emphasis on a civics education and when there is mention of some set of civics requirements the course tends to focus more on teaching history than civics. For instance, in the US in grades K-12 the only social studies course consistently taught is American Government in which the primary focus is on American History with some minor emphasis on teaching the roles of the three branches of government.

Most universities, despite having requirements for language, math, science, writing comprehension, liberal arts, music, ecological awareness, and global diversity, have no civic requirement in any way, shape, or form in order to either enroll in the institution, maintain enrollment, or graduate. Rutgers University in particular follows this same formula in all of its sub-schools with the exception being the School of Environments and Biological Sciences (SEBS), which has a civics-related requirement entitled “Political Processes”. Despite this, most of the offerings for this course deal with global awareness and political history as opposed to engendering an understanding of civics and even politics.

These findings send a dually pronged message, both of which are negative. The first message sent is that civics is history which it is certainly not. Although history is indeed a part of civics, it is not the entire being. To truly understand civics, one must be able to recognize the interplay between governmental roles, the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, the state, and the federal government, as well as many more factors which inevitably play a role in how our everyday lives are affected. By teaching history as civics, school systems are denying students their right to knowledge and awareness. The second message sent, and perhaps the more important, is that a civics education is unimportant to success in life and unnecessary when attempting to form an opinion on political matters. The implications of this view are widespread, because the lack of citizens informed about the role civics plays in their lives causes them to undervalue the importance of the decisions they make regarding political leaders and causes them to form opinions based on unsound knowledge. In addition to this, youths growing up in this climate will be less likely to take an active role in political processes either as a result of an unfamiliarity with the issues at hand or because they do not see the need to, a nonchalant nature stemming from the lack of civics knowledge.
Education and History

(WM) The National Assessment of Educational Progress has recently performed a survey which was administered last spring to 7,000 4th graders, 11,800 8th graders and 12,400 12th graders nationwide in order to test their basic knowledge in history¹. The results revealed that most of the fourth graders were not aware of the accomplishments of Abraham Lincoln and most of the 12th graders were not familiar with the Korean War. Diane Ravitch, an education historian, was shocked that only two percent of 12th grade students were able to answer a question on Brown vs. Board of Education correctly, despite the fact that the decision, as Ms. Ravitch said, was probably the most revolutionary law declared by the Supreme Court in the past century. While the survey results revealed the students’ improvements in math and economics, many blamed the No Child Left Behind policy in which schools are required to focus on raising math and science scores but neglecting the importance of offering valuable history lessons.

The lack of basic history knowledge does not confine to primary and secondary education. A recent civic knowledge test given by Intercollegiate Studies Institute showed that while 56% can name Paula Abdul as a judge on American Idol, only 21% know that the phrase "government of the people, by the people, for the people" comes from Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address². At the same time, only a quarter of the students could answer who the president of the United States was during the First World War, and less than half of the students knew that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are the inalienable rights referred to in the Declaration of Independence³. Perhaps a more startling result from the ISI can awaken us further to discern the fact that history education has been seriously overlooked and is in urgent need to be ameliorated. Based on a recent annual test on basic knowledge of America’s heritage, which was given by the ISI to approximately 14,000 college students at 50 universities across the country, many prestigious institutes, which hold hundreds of years of school history and are internationally famed such as Princeton, Cornell, Yale and Duke scored the lowest in the basic history tests⁴.

Disappointing outcomes like these seem shocking but are regrettably prevalent among American schools nowadays. Therefore, as a young American and a college student, I feel the urge to address these issues and honestly hope to improve the situation by making at least the students in the Rutgers community recognize their
scant but very much needed civic knowledge, and eventually help them to gain more information and interest to learn civics through my service project.

As a result, my partner and I have developed a survey test that contains a few American political and history questions as an approach to see how much the Rutgers community resembles the plight that is shown in the aforementioned public tests. In order to truly reveal the current predicament and confirm the fact that civic education has been extremely overlooked and urgently needs to be amended in this society, our survey questions come directly from the U.S. Immigration citizenship test, which is a standardized test required of every American citizenship applicant prior to their neutralization. While they may not cover every aspect of the field in which we ought to be aware of, I do believe that knowing the answers to these fundamental questions can demonstrate that one is capable of being politically aware as well as fulfilling his or her obligation as a responsible American. Even to those who do not know the answers, this survey will deliver an alarm sign and teach them a lesson by raising their attention and interests in pertinent fields to become more accountable citizens in a long run.

To be specific, our questions fall into two broad sections. One is a picture identification part that contains pictures of important historical figures, events and items and a general Q & A section. Most of the pictures from the first section relate to the information in citizenship test and some are just general history events and figures that we deem to be essential. Every question in the second part, Q &A, comes directly from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ (USCIS) test. In order to make a vivid contrast, I also made a section that contains information regarding contemporary popular trends such as TV dramas, social networking tools and actors and singers for people to identify. Over a period of 4 weeks, 120 people were offered with the survey test and the results have been collected and analyzed. In order to allow everyone to have a closer look at our project, I have included the details of the survey below in hope to demonstrate my project more clearly and also provides more people with the chance to conduct a self-exam test.

The questions from the Q & A section in my survey test are listed below:

1. What territory did the U.S buy from France 1803?
2. How many stars and stripes are there on our national flag? What do they represent?
3. Who did we fight during the Revolutionary War and who was the chief commander?
4. Who discovered America? When?
5. When was the Constitution written?
6. What do we call a change to the Constitution? How many are there?
7. Which countries were our enemies during WWI? WWII?
8. Which holiday did the American colonists celebrate for the first time?
9. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted?
10. What is the name of our national anthem? Who wrote it?
11. In what month do we vote for President?
12. Which president is referred to as the “Father of the country”?
13. Which president of the United States freed the slaves?
14. What is one thing Benjamin Franklin is famous for?
15. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
16. What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens?
17. What is the name of the Vice President of the United States now?
18. Who is the current Speaker of the House of the U.S.?
19. Who is the current Chief Justice of the US now?
20. What are the first three words that signify the idea of self-government in the Constitution?
21. The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. Name one of the writers.
22. What ocean is on the East Coast of the United States?
23. What does the Congress consist of?
24. Who is one of your state’s U.S. Senators now?
25. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?

Civics (History and Government) Questions for the Naturalization Test
http://cltr.co.douglas.nv.us/Elections/US100q.pdf

Through our four weeks of effort, we have collected and analyzed the results from our survey, and after a detailed calculation, the summary, unfortunately, validated our original assumption and matched the results which were demonstrated previously in other public survey sources. According to my survey (The Q & A section, which contains questions that are directly extracted from the U.S. citizenship test), which was given to 120 Rutgers students at various campus locations:

52.4% of the students did not know when or where the US purchased from France in 1803 (Louisiana purchase); nearly 25% of the students did not know how many stars and stripes are there on our national flag or what they represent (shockingly); 29% of the students did not know who we fought the Revolutionary War against or who the chief commander was; over 50 percent of the people did not know who discovered America or when the event took place; almost 80% students did not answer the question correctly that when the supreme law of this country, the Constitution, was written; exactly 50% people failed to answer the question that which countries we fought during the WWI and WWII; over 40% people did not know the exact adoption date of the Declaration of Independence. When we are talking about politically indifferent, our data shows that 17% of the people who took our survey did not know in what month we vote for President and nearly 45% of the students did not know who our vice President is. As far as history is concerned, around 17% students could not remember which president is referred to as the “Father of our country”. As one of my service project main foci, elevating our students’ awareness of politics and history is to help them to become more responsible citizens, yet over 70% of the students were not able to name one responsibility for US citizens. Moreover, not to my surprise, over 90% of the students did not know who the current Speak of the House of the US is and 91% of them did not know who John Roberts, the 17th and current Chief
Justice of the US, is. Over 50% of the people were not aware of the fact that “We the people” are the first three words that signify the idea of self-government in the United States Constitution. Over 80% of them failed to name one of the writers who wrote the Federalist Papers that supported the passage of the U.S. Constitution. More than half of the students could not tell what our Congress is consisted of, and over 75% of them didn’t know the names of their state’s Senators. I clearly recalled similar knowledge were taught in our high school and should be aware of for every citizen, yet over 80% of the students did not know how many voting members there are in the House of Representatives. Out of the 25 questions that were given to the students from the Q & A section, only one question received a good, perfect rather, score, and that was asking which ocean is on the East Coast of the United States. So perhaps American youth aren’t that bad at knowing geography as what people from other countries widely believed, but from this Q & A section which emphasizes on testing basic history and political knowledge, many US citizens should unquestionably ashamed of their performance because these are exactly the same questions that are required of every citizenship applicant before they become US citizens. In other words, after taking this test, many neutralized citizens would know more than native citizens who were born in this country. Shouldn’t we start thinking not to take everything as granted, genuinely drive ourselves on behalf of our children and our country, and factually study and learn to become educated and obligated Americans when comparing to the many who have diligently earned their citizenship?

In order to illustrate the section data more clearly, I have made a histogram below to show the results from the Q & A section in percentage (the blue bars reflect the percentage of people that answered the questions wrong):
The second part in the survey is the picture identification section. My group partner and I have included many widely and important historical figures and events to test the students’ basic civic knowledge. Although these questions are not from the US citizenship test, we believe them to be fundamental knowledge for our generation youths to know.

The specific questions from the picture identification section in my survey test are listed below:

1. A picture of President George Washington.
2. Pictures of two, five, ten, twenty and fifty US dollar bills.
3. A picture of the Washington Monument.
4. A picture of president F.D.R.
6. A picture of J.F.K.
9. A picture of Henry Ford (with an old Ford vehicle next to the picture as a hint).
10. A picture of Thomas Edison.
11. A picture of Mark Twain.
12. A picture of Ralph Emerson.
13. A picture of the Wright Brothers.
14. A picture of Alexander Bell (with an old style telephone next to the picture as a hint).
15. A picture of Walt Disney.
18. A picture of the famous V-Day celebration.
19. A picture of Neil Armstrong's footprint on the moon.

Our data could be concluded with a column chart (Similarly, the blue bars indicate the percentage of wrong answers):
As our column chart indicates, about half of the 20 questions were incorrectly responded at an over 50% ratio: nearly 80% people did not know who the historical figures are in the 2, 5, 10 or 50 dollar bills, the pieces of paper that we spend and see every single day (Okay, perhaps not the 2 dollar and 50 dollar bills but just by seeing the picture, one should know that it is Thomas Jefferson Ulysses S. Grant. I assume that this is the reason that question number 8 was popularly answered wrong as well). Over 80% of them could not identify John Marshall (Chief Justice), Ralph Emerson (famous essayist and poet) and Henry David Thoreau (famous author, poet and philosopher). Around 70% of the people failed to recognize Thomas Edison or Henry Ford (even when the pictures had a light bulb and an old style automobile next them as hints). Nearly 80% of the students failed to identify Mark Twain or got confused by the picture of him with Albert Einstein. Although seems lower in percentage, I was surprised by the fact that nearly 30% people couldn’t recognize the footprint on the moon or weren’t able to tell me that who the first person set foot upon the moon was.

The results from these two sections are indeed astonishing, can we conclude, therefore, that these people are unintelligent and incapable of answering questions? In order to find out where they are really spending their time for, I also added an extra section in which I named it as “Pop culture”. This section is relatively shorter, consists of 10 questions but contain current popular trends regarding video games, television shows and so on. This part of the test serves to present a contrast to the previous two sections, and the specific questions are listed below:

1. A picture of Paula Abdul (Celebrity)
2. A picture of Lady Gaga (Singer)
3. A picture of Twilight (Movie)
4. A picture of Gossip girl (TV Drama)
5. A picture of NCIS (TV Drama)
6. A picture of Justin Bieber (Singer)
7. A picture of Kim Kardashian (Celebrity)
8. A picture contains Twitter, Facebook and MySpace logos (Social networking sites)
9. A picture of World of Warcraft logo (Video game)
10. A picture of the Big Bang Theory (TV Comedy)
Perhaps expectedly, most of the students answered these 10 questions effortlessly, usually in less than 20-30 seconds. The percentages of students answering the questions wrong in this section are shown on left in column chart:

The results are, on some level, even against my own assumptions. As one can see from the chart, every single person from my test pool knows the movie Twilight and signer Justin Bieber, in comparison to the fact that nearly 90% people didn't know Ralph Emerson, our Vice President, David Thoreau or the current Speaker of the House John Boehner. The fact that around 30% to 40% people haven't heard or could not identify TV dramas like the Big Bang Theory, NCIS or video game like World of Warcraft does not please me. In contrast, the reality of about 70% NJ residents couldn't name their states Senators and did not know who wrote our national anthem hurts me more. I am not satisfied by the outcome that everybody knows who George Washington is or 80% of us could identify the Washington Monument, but at least looks better than the fact that close to everyone knew who Kim Kardashian, a TV celebrity that became more popular after a homemade sex tape scandal, was. By no means I am advocating people to watch less TV and read more history books or inciting anyone to read CNN news every day and skip their Modern Warfare battles, yet I believe that, as responsible Americans, as the citizens of the strongest country in the world, we shall and ought to be educated and aware of the most rudimentary and pivotal parts of our country, because we ourselves need to be informed, our children will have to rely on us and threats and competitions from other countries not only need but require us to stay strong, not only financially or militarily, but also intellectually and socially. Understanding basic civic knowledge will not take too much of our time from getting on Facebook, Twitter or watching sport games, but a little reading and listening can genuinely hone our insights of the world, aid us to see where we are heading to, whether we are making unwise mistakes and eventually learn to appreciate this country and our identify as proud American citizens. I know that the students in my survey did not do as well as they should have, but we were not expecting them to ace the test either. The importance is that we found a problem, we recognize and identify it and then we search for solutions to fix it. Hopefully our service project brought attention to the ones that are indeed of the much-needed civic knowledge and actually helped them to discern their shortcomings at this point. It is our pleasure to see that many students inquired about the answers to our questions and went to look for solutions afterwards. It is our sincere hope that our project has more or less rung a bell to everyone in the community and, although our influence is limited, we expect more people to really start taking actions to amend these problems, because civic knowledge facilitates shunting the darkness of ignorance away and really enlighten us with light of comprehension and responsibilities. I am not advocating for people to no longer watch TV or use Facebook, but spare some time for the needed history. Civic knowledge shunts the darkness of ignorance away and edifies us with prosperous light.
Editor’s Letter

Dear Editor Cooke:

On behalf of the Rutgers University Community, I am writing this letter to you and in hope to address my concerns via your newspaper. I am currently doing a service project, which focuses on remediying civic knowledge. The reason behind my project is that knowledge of civics serves important roles in helping us navigate through various types of challenges in life as well as aiding us to make the right decisions by avoiding similar mistakes that have occurred in the past. By learning history and politics, for example, we Americans will understand and learn to appreciate the history of our country, the preciousness of the legacies that our ancestors have left us and become better citizens by being more politically aware and active. Numerous recent public surveys, however, have revealed an unfortunate reality that today’s American youths are largely in poor shape of being able to merit their status as answerable American citizens and lack much of the most basic civic knowledge. In order to personally examine this phenomenon and illustrate the true circumstance, I have been conducting a survey at multiple locations at Rutgers University in the past 4 weeks. The survey, which was offered to 200 Rutgers students, is consisted of a general Q&A section and picture identification section. Most of the questions in my survey come directly from the U.S. Immigration test which requires every citizenship applicant to know prior to their neutralization. After weeks of conducting, collecting and analyzing the results, I am reluctant yet certain to confirm that they validated the previous public tests that the importance of civic knowledge has been awfully undercooked by my generation and urgently needs to be amended. By performing such a service project, I have rung an alarm bell and reminded them that, as responsible American citizens, we have the obligations to know the history of our country, to become more educated and involved in politics, and, in general, to be more familiar with civics in order to help this nation to stay refined and prosperous. It was my glad to see that some of the students went to search for the answers to my test questions afterwards and some factually realized their shortcomings and said that they would start to learn more about pertinent knowledge. While I genuinely felt that I have made an impact on them, my individual influence, however, is very limited. Therefore, I hope the Courier News and you, Mr. Cooke can help me address these issues through your newspaper and, together, we can serve our community by making its members more cultured and responsible Americans.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

William Meng

Rutgers University New Brunswick Campus
School of Environmental and Biological Sciences
Class of 2012
Letter to the Editor of the Daily Targum

To the Rutgers Student Body:

As part of a required Jr/Sr Colloquium in ethics I have been taking this past Fall semester, I have been required to think of something that bothered me, or an issue I thought needed correction, and address that cause throughout the semester. In association with my partner, William Meng, I researched the fundamental lack of civics education here at Rutgers and then compared that to the knowledge required by the Federal Government for any immigrant wishing to become a citizen. The results were, not surprisingly, disappointing.

First and foremost, a working knowledge of civics is necessary for navigating through the political sphere that permeates throughout everyday life. From education to the economy, all things are in some way affected by politics and thus an operational knowledge of civics is helpful for anyone hoping to affect change. In effect, understanding civics and history will greatly aid an understanding of how things work in everyday life, “in the real world” so to speak. It is thus unfortunate that previous research has shown that the majority of the American Youth population lacks a basic civics knowledge and do not rank well when compared to other nations or even to American Youths in the past.

Using this as motivation, my partner and I decided to perform a survey as our service project in order to see just how well Rutgers students would stack up. Although disillusioned by the research we had read, the expectation was that although Rutgers students would do poorly, at the very least they would score better than the national average. We were wrong. In fact, our survey type research confirmed the data quite accurately.

At this point, we are left to wonder how to fix such a problem. If people, not knowing civics, attempt to make decisions (voting) that require a working civics knowledge in order to make an educated decision, the future of the American nation as an integral superpower is at stake. It with this knowledge, that we thus give this warning to the Rutgers population – although you should not forgo all sources of entertainment in order to foster your knowledge of civics, it is still a vital part of your role as an American citizen and should not be taken lightly. A people who do not know their history or how their nation works are doomed to failure – we are a young nation, we shouldn’t be a stupid one too.
Proposal to President McCormick

President’s Office
83 Somerset Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Dear President McCormick,

My name is Oluyinka Igberase and I currently a Senior in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. I am writing this letter today to bring to your attention an area that our school is unfortunately, severely lacking in. On behalf of myself, my partner, William Meng, as well as our professor Dr. Julie Fagan Ph.D, we would greatly appreciate it if you could give this issue some thought and come to an appropriate solution that will address this positively. Thank-you for your time and understanding.

As part of a required Jr/Sr Colloquium (Ethics in the Sciences) that I have been taking this past Fall semester, I have been required to think of something that bothered me, or an issue I thought needed correction, and address that cause throughout the semester. In association with my partner, William Meng, I researched the fundamental lack of civics education here at Rutgers and then compared that to the knowledge required by the Federal Government for any immigrant wishing to become a citizen. The results were, not surprisingly, disappointing.

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Using this as motivation, my partner and I decided to perform a survey as our service project in order to see just how well Rutgers students would stack up. Although disillusioned by the research we had read, the expectation was that although Rutgers students would do poorly, at the very least they would score better than the national average. We were wrong. On the average, when asked a list of 25 questions randomly taken directly from the nationalization exam, Rutgers students were as bad as, or even worse than, the results shown in research. If compared with the requirements for nationalization,
most, if not all, Rutgers students would not make a passing grade. In the second part of our survey we did a picture questionnaire, in which the participant was asked to guess the identity of the figure depicted. Compared to the survey questionnaire, the participants did a lot worse on the civics pictures, than the popular culture section. In fact the greatest error on the pop culture section was in identifying the TV show the Big Bang Theory, which at 40% pales in comparison to the smallest average error in the civics section - a 20% error in identifying a picture of the Wright Brothers.

With results such as these, we are left to wonder at a possible solution to this a complex problem that has carried over since grade school. It is thus that we make the suggestion for Rutgers to pioneer the effort, towards a more expansive understanding of civics by college-aged students, by becoming the first school to require a civics/history section on its placement examinations. Making an understanding of civics part of the placement exams would allow students who are lacking in the fundamental to have to take a course geared towards that specific focus. Just as expository writing teaches us how to be better writers, and by extension better critical thinkers, so too could this course enable people to know civics, and become better citizens. This would also send the message that Rutgers cares about civics and is willing to take a step towards solving the discrepancies in education. We understand that this may not be looked upon favorably by a lot of incoming students and we are open to any other suggestions you may have, but we can see no other option that sends the same message to the population. I look forward to receiving a response from you in the future and hope to one day read in the paper about Rutgers as a pioneer institution in civic knowledge and engagement.

Oluyinka Igberase (Rutgers Student)
Piscataway, NJ 08854

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