

4. Instructions for “How Do You Define Political Engagement?” Activity

Use the worksheet at the end of this document as the basis for the activity. The following are some suggestions for using the worksheet in a classroom activity:

- Make enough copies of the worksheet for everyone in the class.
- Have each student spend 10 minutes individually with the worksheet, numbering the items from 1-15 according to how closely they fit her or his definition of civic engagement.
- After students have completed filling out their worksheets individually, have them get together in groups of 2-4, and share their top and bottom choices. Have them spend 15 minutes discussing why they ranked their choices as they did.

Whole Class Discussion

Gather the groups back together for approximately 20 minutes of discussion around the following questions:

- Were there differences between students in your group? What were they?
- Were certain items ranked highly by all students in the group? Why? Were certain items ranked low? Why?
- What did you learn from each other about the reasons some actions were ranked as they were?
- What did this exercise teach you about people's ideas concerning participation in civic life?

Alternative Whole Class Activity

After students have completed filling out their sheets individually, instead of putting them in small groups, ask the class to line up according to their rankings on several of the items you call out. Ask the students on each end of the spectrum to say why they ranked the item so high or low. (This activity works particularly well when you have a larger class.) Then engage in a discussion with the class about the activity, using the whole class discussion questions above.

Optional Extended Activity

Once the class discussion is finished, have the students fold over their individual sheets and put their name on the outside. Hold onto their preference checklists until the end of the course or program. At that point, hand out the lists once again and have students review their rankings. Ask students to write an essay comparing their current thinking about political engagement with the worksheet they completed at the beginning of the project. Would you rank things any differently today? Why or why not? Has this course/program changed your ideas about political engagement? If so, how?

How do you define political engagement?

People define political engagement in different ways. Represented below are actions that people might cite as exemplary political engagement. Place a "1" next to the action that most closely models your own idea of political engagement. Place a "2" next to the action that is the second closest, etc., up to 15.

_____ Voting.

_____ Leading an interracial dialogue on neighborhood crime prevention.

_____ Volunteering for a candidate in a local, state, or national election.

_____ Signing a petition calling upon your local university to provide a living wage for all its workers.

_____ Reading a daily newspaper and accessing other media to keep up with current events.

_____ Joining a political party.

_____ Writing and submitting an editorial on campaign finance reform to campus and local papers.

_____ Leaving your car at home and biking or walking to work/school every day.

_____ Tutoring children from a local school.

_____ Attending a public debate about tensions between national security and civil rights.

_____ Serving on a jury.

_____ Organizing a grassroots campaign to stop domestic violence.

_____ Giving money to the International Red Cross for tsunami relief.

_____ Getting your friends to write letters to state legislators opposing increases in school tuition.

_____ Boycotting the products of a corporation whose global practices harm the environment.
(Adapted from Nadinne Cruz, "How Do You Define Service?" [February, 1996])