**The Becoming Citizens Program**

Over the past year, CCCE graduate researchers Amanda Ballantyne (Communication) and Nathan Parham (Learning Sciences) have continued to develop the B.C. program into a robust, community centered project that partners with local teachers and youth workers to develop and implement curriculum to teach junior high and high school aged youth use their existing digital media skills to engage in social activism and advocacy. B.C. is a program designed by UW’s Center for Communication and Civic Engagement (CCCE) under the direction of Lance Bennett to give UW undergraduates internship experience while also developing their theoretical understanding of the role of digital media in youth civic education and engagement. The program serves three core purposes for the CCCE: university-community relationship building to foster youth civic engagement, curriculum development and implementation, and undergraduate mentoring and professional development.

**Community Relationship Building:**

Parham and Ballantyne have identified and fostered relationships with teachers and youth workers throughout Seattle who are particularly interested in using digital media platforms to promote youth civic engagement. These educators have become internship advisors for a number of B.C. students each quarter. Parham and Ballantyne work closely with these educators and our B.C. student interns to encourage information and resource sharing among local youth practitioners and CCCE researchers. This quarter, our interns are working with teachers at Shorewood, Cleveland, and Garfield High Schools, as well as at the YMCA, and the Mayor’s Youth Council.

**Curriculum Development:**

Each quarter, a number of B.C. students elect to join the CCCE as research interns. These interns work with Professor Bennett, Parham and Ballantyne to conduct research on the use of digital media in advocacy as a youth development strategy, and then to develop curriculum modules to help junior high and high school aged youth take action to solve social and political problems in their own communities. Several of these video-curriculum modules covering topics like Blogging, Digital Storytelling, Social Networking and Digital Citizenship area already available on the Puget Sound Off website: http://www.pugetsoundoff.org/how-to.

For the past year, the interns have focused on creating a four-part curriculum on Digital Activism and Advocacy. This curriculum talks young people through the steps of conceptualizing, strategizing and implementing an issue-advocacy campaign with easily accessible online tools. Our interns have also worked with several teachers in Washington State to develop a classroom-based curriculum, in line with the Washington State Educational Standards, to help teachers incorporate blogging about political issues into their existing course curriculum. Both of these materials will be available to educators in the Seattle area early this summer.

**Undergraduate Mentoring and Professional Development:**

In addition to advancing research, fostering community relationships and producing youth civic engagement curriculum, B.C. has become an informal mentoring program for undergraduate students. Interested student interns are encouraged to continue working with B.C. and the CCCE for multiple quarters. Senior interns become project leaders, organizing and managing much of the work done by newer B.C. interns. With this staffing structure for research and curriculum develop projects, interns learn to collaborate and deliver high-quality products, to arrange and facilitate meetings, and to learn basic project and time management skills. Ballantyne and Parham work closely with the CCCE interns on their professional development, including writing, public speaking, networking, responsibility and leadership.

Scott Brekke Davis, a winter and spring quarter Becoming Citizens Interns, Spring 2009

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The face of civic media is rapidly changing. The past twenty years have seen a rapid shrinking and graying of the audience regularly paying attention to what has long been considered “news.” This trend has caused newspapers to slash their budgets and newsrooms, pundits to decry the decline of informed democracy, and Stephen Colbert to quip that rather than intimidating rivals with dead fish wrapped in newspapers, mobsters have begun simply sending dead newspapers.

Changes in civic media practices are most pronounced among young people, who attend to the traditional news media most loosely and skeptically, and whose facility with digital channels of information have earned them the moniker “digital natives.” Changes in the acquisition, production and use of civic information have major implications for how young people develop as citizens in a democratic society. The main research focus at CCCE in recent years has been aimed at understanding the implications of this shift toward digital media tools and skills for the production of information and organization of civic action. Research funded by the MacArthur Foundation and the Surdna Foundation under the direction of CCCE director Lance Bennett has enabled CCCE to hire more than a dozen talented students and professional staff, who have contributed to the design and operation of learning communities such as Becoming Citizens and community projects such as Puget Sound Off.

We are now in the second phase of the Civic Learning Online project, which has been generously funded by the MacArthur Foundation’s Digital Media and Learning Initiative. One part of this project involved analysis of 90 top youth civic engagement websites. Data gathered in the first year of the study looked at the civic skills and citizenship styles projected by the content on the site itself. Highlights from this research were presented by CCCE graduate students Chris Wells and Deen Freelon at the International Communication Association in May, and the American Education Research Association in April. CCCE Director Lance Bennett has lectured on this project at international conferences in England, Italy, Germany, Sweden, and Hungary. Our findings reveal stark differences in the online civic environments produced by different kinds of organizations, with conventional civic organizations and interest groups having trouble adapting to the interactive preferences of young citizens. The most successful adaptation of technologies for social networking and digital advocacy have been by new online-only organizations that are better able to change the very definitions of information and organization in the digital age. Data gathered this year will reveal how young users of these sites engage with different online environments in terms of their own contributions to the sites—blog posts, video creations, project pages, group formations, events listings, and more.

Funding by the Surdna Foundation for CCCE’s Becoming Citizens undergraduate internship program has enabled us to apply what we are learning in the MacArthur project to help Seattle area teens develop the digital skills they need to better engage with politics and public life. UW undergraduate interns work with teachers, community teens, and local community partners to develop civic media skills training, some of which can be viewed on the Puget Sound Off youth site. The focus on research and training involving digital media and civic learning recognizes the potential of the online places where young people are spending their time. This work also seeks to understand the shifting definitions of ‘civic,’ along with the many new and creative uses of digital media in public life.

CCCE HOSTS MEDIA AND YOUTH LEADERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

On a rainy winter quarter day, Dr. Lance Bennett and the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement hosted a remarkable gathering of non-governmental officers and leaders from around the world. The meeting served as a forum for globally focused discussion on civic engagement. The group was in the United States for a conference about global media, and met with Dr. Bennett because they were...
of Seattle, and the City of Seattle – focuses on promoting and facilitating youth civic engagement. Though aimed at connecting Puget Sound-area youth, PSO is regularly being explored by a worldwide audience, with a clear plurality of hits originating from Seattle. The information about who is visiting PSO and where the users are located comes from Google Analytics, a popular web site tracking service that reports a number of statistics about a site's visitors—where they visited from, which links they followed to reach the site, what pages they visited, and more. We began using Google Analytics to record PSO’s visitor data on February 27, 2009, and here are a few web traffic highlights from the period between then and May 11, 2009:

**General**
- PSO has accumulated 10,800 “visits” in all, which are defined as site use sessions delineated by at least 30 minutes of inactivity. This works out to roughly 148 visits per day, though they are not evenly distributed—traffic tends to dip slightly on the weekends.
- These visits produced 67,246 “pageviews,” which count the number of pages a person views in a single visit. The average number of pages viewed per visit was 6.23, indicating that many visitors are deeply engaged with the site.

**Location**
- A majority of visitors come from the Seattle metropolitan area and Puget Sound region.
- Eight out of the top ten visitor-producing cities are located in the Puget Sound area. The other two are New York City (#6) and Los Angeles (#10).
- PSO is a truly global site, having hosted visitors from 108 countries spanning every continent except Antarctica over the past 2.5 months alone.
- PSO is big both at home and at school: the top two ISPs sending visitors are the Seattle Public Schools and Comcast (many of which are undoubtedly home users).

**Traffic Sources**
- Roughly equal shares of traffic (totaling 78%) come from search engines and “direct” visits, in which visitors either type the URL in manually or have PSO bookmarked. Many keywords in searches were clearly civic in nature, such as “should the death penalty be legal”, “affirmative action pro”, and “difference between free trade and fair trade”.

Clearly, PSO is having a powerful impact both within the Puget Sound and beyond. We anticipate these encouraging traffic trends to continue as word about the site spreads.

**PSO wins public technology award.** Just as this story went to press we learned that PSO has won a national award from the Public Technology Institute (PTI) for best web and e-government services. The award was given to the City of Seattle, whose Department of Community Technology under the direction of David Keyes has been working on this project with Lance Bennett and CCCE staff, and the Metrocenter YMCA led by Chris Tugwell.

**PUGET SOUND OFF’S WRITE YOUR OWN BILL CONTEST**

In the spirit of empowering local youths and promoting civic learning, the Puget Sound Off website recently announced its newest contest. The contest challenges local youth to think about changes they would like to see happen—locally or globally—and then utilize their energy and creativity to design their own bill in support of their position. They can either create a serious bill (i.e. There will be a $100 fine for anyone caught illegally downloading music) or a funny bill (i.e. Every Friday should henceforth be known as Hawaiian shirt day). Whether serious or funny, all entries must be formatted in the same manner as a legislative bill.

Tyler Goulet, an undergraduate research assistant at CCCE, explains that the idea and plan for the contest was the result of an intensive brainstorming meeting between PSO users and staff at the YMCA. “The idea was to get together and create a new contest. We all broke into about four teams and brainstormed together... We switched tables a few times so that new brains would come together. In the end, we had about 30 different ideas. Each person talked about their favorite idea so we could all get a better idea of what was going on. Then we voted on the one we thought would work the best. The idea that won was the Write a Bill contest.” Though YMCA and CCCE staff have overseen the process and mentored youths along the way, the contest is almost entirely created and run by Seattle youth.
As part of our ongoing commitment to promoting youth civic engagement and education, the Becoming Citizens interns recently developed a beta version of a blogging curriculum. Designed for both teachers and their students, the blogging curriculum strives to increase youth engagement by helping students in the Puget Sound-area learn how to effectively express themselves through writing and blogging. The curriculum promotes civic learning by helping students gain cutting edge digital media skills. These digital skills will help students to communicate their ideas and become more involved in their communities; the curriculum also provides a forum for civic dialogue between students.

In addition to teaching students new digital media skills, the blogging curriculum also offers tools for instructors. The blogging curriculum helps teachers learn how to effectively integrate blogging into their classes, offering sample subjects and prompts for students to blog about. Our goal is to provide teachers with a comprehensive curriculum and enrichment materials that will help them find new and exciting ways to incorporate blogging into their classrooms. When developing the blogging curriculum, the intern team led by undergraduate Kevin Norman worked closely with local teachers under the supervision of CCCE graduate researcher Nathan Parham from the UW College of Education.

In the curriculum, high school students first learn about the mechanics and technical details of blogging on Puget Sound Off (www.pugetsoundoff.org). Students are then encouraged to choose a topic that is meaningful and to begin blogging about it. Instructors may then decide what the students will be blogging about for the rest of the curriculum. The framework for the curriculum is designed around the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALR), so that the CCCE blogging curriculum is not only useful for teachers, but also provides an incentive to use it.

Connecting with teachers to work closely as a team to design the blogging curriculum made the experience an enriching one for Becoming Citizens interns. They faced unexpected challenges and solved unforeseen problems. Interns received an opportunity to work on a professional project and develop skills they can into the workforce and their communities. They received great help from former Shelton High School teacher, Dawn Stevens, who gave the project the structure it needed to serve as a strong learning and teaching tool.

The challenges along the way created a sense of community among the interns. Once they realized the curriculum’s potential for changing the way civics is taught in high schools, the CCCE student team worked above and beyond the academic requirements needed to complete the Becoming Citizens internship. Their motivation drove them to develop a high quality product that represents CCCE’s efforts to enhance youth civic learning and build stronger relationships with local schools.
eager to learn about Puget Sound Off and other civic engagement projects being undertaken by the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement. The opportunity proved invaluable for sparking dynamic conversation and mutual learning.

The 30 conference members came from a plethora of occupations, backgrounds, cultures, and even continents. The organizations from which they came, for instance, included the Global Terrorism Research Center in Australia, The Communication Center at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, the National Council of Family Affairs from Jordan, the Human Rights Consultative Committee in Malawi, and Sonora Ciudadana A.C. (a research center for development and democracy) in Mexico. The conference members also included news producers, journalists, and media/communication representatives from Spain, Malaysia, the Philippines, Egypt, Armenia, Georgia, Nigeria, Bahrain, Jordan, the Slovak Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Myanmar, Turkey, Belize, and Kosovo; given the diversity of experiences and positions the attendees held, one could have mistaken the event for a global summit. Some of the individuals had been to the United States before but for many, the conference marked their first visit.

After extensive smiles, handshakes, and introductions, Dr. Bennett began by leading a discussion about the roles news and media play in society, focusing on the quality of news and the frequent disconnection between news/media and civic activism. Dr. Bennett described how feelings of mainstream media disempowerment run particularly deep in younger members of American society. The conference attendees also watched a short video about the Pugetsoundoff website and its goals of helping youth organize, take action, engage with politics and important issues, and build effective digital skills. The members of the delegation asked such questions as: “How can you be certain your website is a safe space?” and “How do you compete with other networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace?”

The attendees listened intently, took notes, and spoke engagingly about their own experiences. Dr. Bennett also utilized the opportunity to gather input on how to make PSO more globally focused. Suggestions included adding further support to internationally-focused groups on PSO or connecting with like-minded organizations across the globe.

In a post-conference email, one of the attendees, a journalist, political writer, and website content manager from Egypt wrote: “It was very good to talk and listen to Professor Lance Bennett…. My visit to the United States was my first one… I am really feeling lucky to visit that great country and meet all of these nice people during this historical phase in American history. I have learned a lot about the American political system, the American culture and the democracy that we are dreaming about in our beloved country and for sure a lot about the civic activism and volunteer work which I hope that one day will be part of the Egyptian culture.” In addition, the journalist shared that upon returning to Egypt, he had written a great deal inspired by his experiences in the United States. One article was even featured on the most popular talk show in Egypt.
CCCE SERVES AS MODEL FOR NEW ILLINOIS CENTER

The State of Illinois has allocated generous funding for the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) at University of Illinois, Chicago, with the aim of promoting civic participation and helping university programs “better position themselves at the crossroads of technology and civic engagement.” The consultants working to develop this center identified CCCE as a possible model. On May 12th, Lance Bennett and the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement staff met with consultants Mary Feeney from the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC) and Gretchen Gano, a librarian for Public Administration and Government Information at New York University.

Part of the mission of the new UIC center is to “create a more fully engaged citizenry with more effective leaders” and to “use a blended learning environment that includes both in-person and online resources” in the areas of “e-democracy,” public forums and informational resources.

Given the new center’s goals, conversation focused on a variety of CCCE initiatives ranging over research and applied projects in the community. Becoming Citizens staff Amanda Ballantyne and Nathan Parham discussed relationship between local teachers and the CCCE. Partnering with teachers helps the CCCE understand their needs, resulting in curriculum that teachers may incorporate into their classroom teaching. Amanda and Nate also emphasized the teaching component of the Puget Sound Off website, reinforcing the idea that in order to promote digital citizenship, it is essential to make sure youth possess skills that enable them to communicate effectively. Dr. Bennett also stressed that having an active research agenda helps to attract post-doctoral researchers who bring a great deal of creative energy to a center.

Mary Feeney asked the CCCE team what some of their dream projects were. Dr. Bennett mentioned helping youth get access to affordable technology such as flip cameras, to go along with more civic skills training to promote better quality citizen communication and organization for advocacy. Perhaps the University of Illinois’ new center will become a partner in addressing these challenges.