

Center for Communication & Civic Engagement



Volume 5, 2007

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Learning Communities Thrive at CCCE

Bringing Citizenship Online: The Seattle Youth Commons

Citizenship and civic engagement have been sadly neglected in our schools, where approaches often seem out of touch with the lives of students. CCCE is planning to engage teens where they live: online. The Seattle Youth Commons, scheduled to roll out in September of 2007, will be a network of youth civic engagement resources centered around an interactive website. Some have referred to the goal of the Youth Commons as a MySpace that's less about "my" space and individual voice and more about "our" concerns and developing a public voice that can speak to others about community issues.

CCCE is working with the City of Seattle, the YMCA, OneEconomy, the Seattle Public Libraries, and other organizations to help design this media environment. A team of interns from Becoming Citizens is working with community youth organizations to bring young people into the center of the design and operation of the project. Ideas for the project were also previewed at the Mayor's Youth Town Hall and the library's youth arts night in the spring. A summer design and build program involves CCCE students and is coordinated by the downtown YMCA.

Becoming Citizens Program Completes its First Full Year

This spring, the Becoming Citizens program is celebrating its first birthday. Developed by CCCE director Lance Bennett with support from the office of the provost, Becoming Citizens connects University of Washington undergraduates with non-profit organizations and public school classrooms. The UW students facilitate civic engagement activities for youth across Seattle and Bellevue. While interning with the civic organizations, students also participate in a UW seminar led by Research Assistant Chris Wells that explores research on citizenship and civic engagement, with a focus on strategies being developed around the world for providing young people with the tools they need to be effective citizens. This spring, twenty-two interns engaged with ten different programs, schools and projects across the city.

Students involved in Becoming Citizens have cited it as one of the best experiences of their undergraduate years. Some have noted the unique appeal of a seminar in which classroom learning is directly applicable to a community situation, which then feeds experiences and information back to illuminate the readings and discussions of seminar.

CCCE plans to continue the Becoming Citizens program, with a strong link between the interns and our newest project, the Seattle Youth Commons.

New Faculty and Student Projects

Fair Trade Project Brings Students into Research Process

Students are joining CCCE faculty in learning about the global economy from the ground up. Center Director Lance Bennett and Associate Director Kirsten Foot are leading a student-faculty team investigating how consumer awareness and buying choices can improve the economic and social conditions for those who grow crops around the world.

Professor Bennett invited interested undergraduates from a large lecture course to learn more about consumer politics by taking a research seminar entitled, "Consumer Politics: The Case of Coffee." Assisting him with the class were communication graduate students Toby Campbell and Lea Werbel, who also participated in research on fair trade networks at CCCE. A highlight of the class was a series of visits from fair trade experts, including representatives from TransFair USA, the Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign, the UW Fair Trade Coffee Coalition, as well as Professor Angelina Godoy from UW's Jackson School, Professor Matt Warning who teaches economics at the University of Puget Sound, and noted local filmmaker John de Graaf, who screened his film *Buyer Be Fair*. The students crafted their own independent research projects, many of which have continued to develop as integral parts of the ongoing research at the Center.

Learning about strategies for mobilizing businesses and consumers in different nations has produced a comparison of NGO and business networks in the US and the UK, resulting in new contributions to theories of networks. The research team is preparing several papers that will include faculty and students as authors. In addition, several impressive undergraduate projects will be published on the CCCE website to serve as original research sources for other scholars, and as models for future students at UW. Funding for this project was provided to Professor Bennett through a grant from the Belgian Science Policy Foundation.

MacArthur Digital Learning Initiative CCCE

In the past year, CCCE has moved to the center of activity in the important area of youth and digital media. Digital communication technologies from cell phones to computers offer new opportunities to involve young people in civic life. Millions of teens participate in online networking sites such as MySpace. The challenge is how to involve them more in public life. Center Director Lance Bennett has led a series of workshops and online discussions involving leading international experts in civic engagement and digital media, resulting in *Civic Life Online*, a volume to be published by MIT Press. Planned research inspired by this project will look at the Seattle Youth Commons to see how teens are using it, and how schools, youth organizations and libraries can use these digital technologies to connect young people more effectively to public life. A number of students have received funding or internship credits to work on aspects of the Youth Commons project and related youth engagement activities. Along with faculty, students at CCCE such as Chris Wells are producing original research in this area.

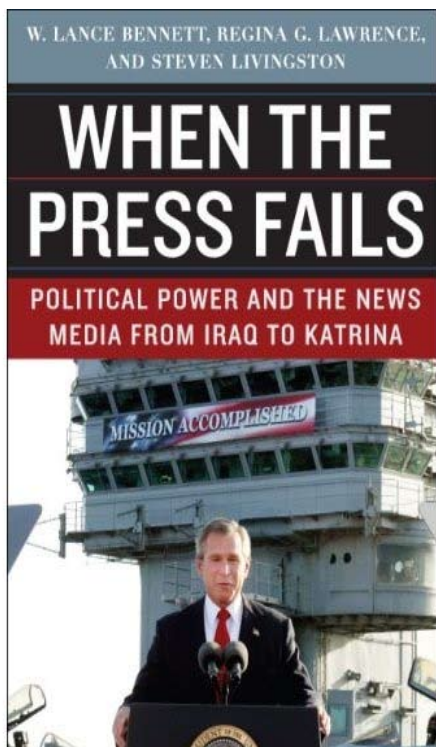
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www.engagedcitizen.org

New Books from CCCE Faculty

When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina

(University of Chicago Press 2007). CCCE Director Lance Bennett and coauthors Regina Lawrence and Steven Livingston conclude that the mainstream press has grown too close and too preoccupied with power in Washington to maintain the critical distance required for independent journalism. Press handling of the run-up to the Iraq War and later stories about Abu Ghraib and US treatment of detainees indicates that the news follows the spin from Washington, with dangerous consequences for informed public opinion. Only when government officials are caught off guard and events are experienced directly by journalists, as happened with Hurricane Katrina, does the US press seem able to report with critical candor. As with most research at CCCE this project gave numerous undergraduate and graduate students firsthand opportunities to become involved in gathering and analyzing data. Several original student projects are still underway, and are expected to result in publications.



Web Campaigning



During the 2004 elections, grad and undergrad students affiliated with the CCCE worked with Associate Director Kirsten Foot and researchers in nineteen other countries in the Internet & Elections project, to study the Web production practices of campaigns and other political actors. The results of their findings about the US elections were published in a book Foot co-authored with Steve Schneider from SUNY Institute of Technology, called *Web Campaigning* (MIT Press 2006), with over 200 screenshots available at: <http://mitpress.mit.edu/webcampaigning>. A comparison of the US electoral web sphere with those across Europe and Asia has been published in *The Internet and National Elections: A Comparative Study of Web Campaigning* co-edited by Foot and Schneider along with Randy Kluver and Nick Jankowski (Routledge, 2007).

CCCE Citizen Roundtable and Future Project Updates

With a membership of more than one hundred community members from many different backgrounds, the Citizen Roundtable continues to showcase UW and local Seattle talent on important topics

John de Graaf

The March 2007 Roundtable hosted documentary filmmaker John de Graaf, who discussed his latest project *What's the Economy for Anyway?* The audience engaged in lively discussion of how economic values and policies result in very personal outcomes, including the quality of health care and education, everyday stress, and the sustainability of the environment.

What's the Economy for Anyway?

In collaboration with well-known local filmmaker, author, and activist John de Graaf, the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement will launch a learning program called "What's the Economy For, Anyway?" Under the supervision of CCCE Director Lance Bennett, this student driven learning experience will involve a graduate student guiding undergraduates in exploring questions such as: What is the purpose of the economy? How are economies reflections of social values? How do different countries balance economic growth with quality of life issues? The students will then have the opportunity to travel abroad to explore the different decisions that nations make and the constraints they face in addressing economic growth. The experiences and resources gathered by students in this program will then become the basis for designing learning materials to accompany future students in their learning about other societies and cultures. A film is also in the works. John de Graaf will link the learning materials to a film that is likely to attract wide public attention to the project. His previous PBS documentaries include *Affluenza*, *Buyer Be Fair*, and *The Motherhood Manifesto*. Funding for the learning program is provided by the UW Vice Provost for Global Affairs.

How Family-Friendly is America, Anyway?



In May, the Roundtable hosted Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, co-author of *The Motherhood Manifesto* and founder of *Momsrising.org*. Her topic – *How Family-Friendly Is America, Really?* - raised the question of what a national commitment to family values should entail. She also discussed how Washington State's progressive family leave plan came to pass.

***Upcoming Citizen Roundtable:
UW Communication Professor
Leah Cecciarelli discusses "The
Political Attack on Science in
America"***

***For information about joining the
Roundtable invitation list, contact Lance
Bennett at:
lbennett@u.washington.edu***

Center for Communication and Civic Engagement Snap- shots



CCCE Research Assistants Deen Freelon and Toby Campbell and Undergraduate contributor Liz Evans talk to Seattle students about designing a Youth Digital Commons.



CCCE directors Lance Bennett and Kirsten Foot discuss research on fair trade networks with undergraduate research assistant Ben Burkhalter