

How Much Do They Care? What Do They Know? Exploring Teacher Candidates' Civic Attitudes & Civic Knowledge

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The civic skills, dispositions, and knowledge required for engagement in the 21st century have evolved and must be embedded within the K-12 schooling curriculum. These skills and dispositions are taught by educators at all levels, but do teachers know enough or care enough to support the full ideals of civic education? The civic attitudes and civic knowledge of teacher candidates in various fields were explored utilizing survey research and supporting quantitative measures. Using self-reported data, findings and implications are offered based on various demographic variables (academic program track, gender, race, and status as a college student). This paper is a condensed version of the authors dissertation study, using the source material and presenting it to a broader audience. As the primary purpose of schools is to educate future citizens and provide them with the skills and dispositions needed to function in a democratic society, the findings of this paper will help inform and support the development of future teachers through the lens of civic education.

Keywords: civic education, civic attitudes, civic knowledge, teacher candidates, democratic education

Introduction

The political sphere in the United States finds itself in a perilous place – partisan politics, unsubstantiated reports of election fraud, and “fake news” are prevalent and pervasive. Many contend that dysfunction in Washington D.C. and electoral issues at the state and local levels are all indicators of a need to revamp the education of American youth to highlight civics and government in the same way math and science have been highlighted with various STEM initiatives (Cardinali, 2018; Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Scholars and reformers alike have argued for increased funding and focus on civic education in the K-12 setting, even promoting

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standardized testing to ensure civics is rooted within the schools (Gonch & Poliakoff, 2016; Journell, 2015). Institutions of higher education, that appeared to leave the virtues and instruction of civic education in their past have also attempted to address the gap by reforming programs and course offerings (Colby et al., 2007; Ehrlich, 2000).

Several states, including Florida, have started requiring some form of coursework in civics for all middle grade's students (Florida Department of Education, 2016). Similarly, the professional organization for social studies education, The National Council for the Social Studies, endorses the following within The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework (2013):

In a constitutional democracy, productive civic engagement requires knowledge of the history, principles, and foundations of our American democracy, and the ability to participate in civic and democratic processes. People demonstrate civic engagement when they address public problems individually and collaboratively and when they maintain, strengthen, and improve communities and societies. Thus, civics is, in part, the study of how people participate in governing society. (p. 31)

With such a concerted and seemingly unified push, it becomes vital for reformers of civic education at all levels – local, state, and federal – to be involved in exploring this revitalization. Though an important question arises – how prepared are the teachers teaching civics?

Within this civic renewal, the voices of colleges of education and teacher preparation programs are lagging behind. These schools and programs are tasked with producing teachers who can support, develop, and deliver instructional content, inclusive of the goals and purposes of civic education and democratic principles, yet it is difficult to find any that require coursework that prepares all educators to teach civic skills and dispositions. While some universities have started to offer optional coursework in civic education to preservice teachers and teacher candidates, it is rarely a requirement, and almost never a focus (Colby et al., 2007; Ehrlich, 2000; Journell, 2015). Recently, the Florida legislature began requiring students entering a Florida College System institution or state university to demonstrate competency in civic literacy starting in 2018-19, though there is not a baseline for measuring previous students and the merits/impact of this legislative action are yet to be known (Postal, 2018). The author surveyed teacher candidates who were in their final semester of coursework before becoming certified educational professionals and

analyzed the findings based on select demographic and academic variables in an effort to explore the differences in teacher candidates' civic attitudes and civic knowledge – investigating how much they care and what much they may know about civics.

Review of the Literature

Civic education is a thread that can be found strategically woven into the fabric of American schools; reworked, revised, and reconsidered throughout the duration of the Republic. From the time of the first colonies in America to the Common School Movement of Horace Mann to Pragmatic views of John Dewey (Spring, 2005), the goals of education are deeply rooted in creating a citizenry that can self-govern and sustain a democratic society worthy of its posterity. As one traces the history of civic education, it is not without contention and the views regarding the role of civic education in the United States have seen significant ebbs and flows. Until the early 1960s, it was common for high school students in America to take up to three courses relating to civics and government. These courses, such as *Problems of Democracy*, afforded students the chance to explore the citizen's role in society and provided them with opportunities to discuss current events in the school setting (McConnell, 2007). In the decades since, variations of these course offerings have been all but eliminated. As a result, many students have gone through their educational careers experiencing a singular course on American government, which covered content, but neglected the students' roles as participatory citizens in the Republic (Gutmann, 1987; McConnell, 2007). Even political scientists, who should serve as the flag bearers for civic education and political engagement, seemingly abandoned the subject in K-12 schools (Niemi & Smith, 2001).

As argued by Gutmann (1987), schools should play a vital role in fostering the attitudes and dispositions needed to allow the upcoming generation to participate and engage effectively, and these values are instilled from the collective ideals of the community. Scholars also suggest that schools should not only teach students the democratic skills student will need as they mature into adulthood, but schools should also participate in the democratic process themselves (Gutmann, 1999; Hecht, 2015; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Hewitt, 2006). Through the schooling of the children, society provides students with the civic skills that are believed necessary to be successful upon entering the real world.

Civic skills: inclusive of critical thinking, debate and discourse, analyzing multiple perspectives, are key components in developing students' future civic

abilities and holding positive civic attitudes and dispositions (Gutmann, 1987; Hewitt, 2006; Levine, 2014; Levinson 2007, 2011). Dana Bennis (n.d) further articulates this notion and the vital need to create schools that provide students with these opportunities to grow as citizens:

If living in democratic societies committed to human rights creates well-being, AND If people learn primarily based on the people and environment that surrounds them, AND If culture is transmitted from one generation to another, THEN We need to create environments where people of all ages, especially youth, are immersed in the values, practices, and beliefs of democratic societies and human rights. (para 5)

Educators are the common denominator, as they not only teach students, but also model the skills and dispositions for active participation within the political sphere to their students.

Understanding the civic attitudes teacher candidates hold and the civic knowledge they possess aligns with their ability to educate the next generation. Exploring the civic attitudes and knowledge of teacher candidates becomes an essential component to deepening the deliberative democratic skills that scholars argue students need going into the future to sustain a democratic society (Campbell et al., 2012; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). While voter turnout in the 2020 election was greatly increased compared to prior years, researchers have found that the civic attitudes and engagement levels of college students, on the whole, are disparagingly low (Dalton, 2015; Ehrlich, 2000; Jacoby, 2009; Lawless & Fox, 2015; Levine, 2014; Saltmarsh, 2005). Gonch and Poliakoff (2016) found that American college graduates had poor civic knowledge and were ill equipped to respond to the most basic of content related questions. That is to say, college students are increasingly less likely to be engaged in political and governmental affairs.

Galston (2007) argues "...civic knowledge is an important determinant of civic capability and character. Moreover, findings suggest that formal, classroom-based civic education provides an effective means of teaching civic knowledge" (p. 639). Further, Dudley and Gitelson (2002) found that "...political knowledge is a necessary precondition to civic engagement, but information, per se, is unlikely to be a sufficient precondition to civic engagement" (p. 178). Taken together, civic education provides students with greater civic skills and capabilities. While simply knowing facts does not mean a student will become civically engaged, knowing facts surely appears to

help (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002; Galston, 2007). However, the knowledge, attitudes, and skills teacher candidates possess is still a relatively unknown component.

Investigating teacher candidates, specifically in the social studies, Journell (2013), found the trends of general college students hold up. Social studies teacher candidates: preservice teachers who due to the subject matter that they chose to teach should be highly engaged and knowledgeable about current events and politics, responded at “discouraging” levels. While focused more directly on political knowledge, a highlight from this study comes from extracts of the survey responses. While many respondents could answer basic content questions, such as the length of a president’s term or what impeachment was, just 6% of secondary teacher candidates and 2% of middle grades teacher candidates could name two rights listed in the 5th Amendment. Similarly, 16% of secondary preservice teachers could not name the Vice President at the time of the study (Journell, 2013).

Journell (2013) argues, “Within social studies education, a tenet of teaching for democratic citizenship is the ability of teachers to take aspects of the formal curriculum and apply them to discussions of social and political issues” (p. 339). This argument can be made for all content areas with regards to the democratic principles highlighted by Gutmann (1987) and others (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Levine, 2014; Levinson, 2012). The notion that social studies teacher candidates can be so ill-informed highlights the need to investigate not just social studies teacher candidates, but all teacher candidates in developing the understanding of their place within democratic education and the development of future citizens.

Exploring the civic attitudes and knowledge of teacher candidates becomes an important element to deepening the deliberative democratic skills that scholars argue students need going into the future to sustain a democratic society (Campbell, et al., 2012; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Barton (2012) contends “A teacher education program must do more than provide its students with pedagogical skills and knowledge; it must also help them develop a commitment to actually implement these when they have a chance. Not only must teachers know how to teach for democracy, but they must also want to do so” (p. 163). With the advancement and push for programs, specifically in the state of Florida like the Civic Literacy Excellence Initiative (which includes the Civics Seal of Excellence for teachers who go through a professional development program), it becomes important to understand how these programs are grounded and what teachers may or may not already know and understand. Developing teachers who can help produce civically engaged and civically minded students is a primary goal of teacher education programs – as teachers are the delivery system for many of the ideals and values a democratic society wants to

foster. Given the state of political affairs in the country, exploring the civic attitudes and civic knowledge of teacher candidates provides valuable insight for the field and for practitioners within the K-12 setting.

Methods

Overview

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental exploratory design based on self-reported survey data collected during the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters to explore the civic attitudes and civic knowledge level of teacher candidates (Denscombe, 2017; Gall et al., 2007; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). The quantitative measures used in this study in order to examine the differences in civic attitudes and knowledge of teacher candidates included descriptives, t-tests, and ANOVAs (Field, 2013; Laerd Statistics, 2018; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). In cases where data did not present normally or violated assumptions of the parametric tests, non-parametric alternatives were conducted, inclusive of Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis, and Welch ANOVAs (Field, 2013; Laerd Statistics, 2018; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012).

Research Question

Is there a statistically significant difference in teacher candidates' civic attitudes and civic knowledge based on select demographic and academic variables?

Participants

The population in this study included all teacher candidates at a large Southeastern United States university enrolled in their "Internship II" coursework for the fall semester of 2018 and spring semester of 2019. Students enrolled in the course had completed all required coursework and were in their final semester of schooling prior to graduating and becoming credentialed educators. In this final semester, the participants were conducting the field experience/internship component of their degree necessary for certification. These students were assigned to a classroom and were expected to take over full teaching responsibilities by the end of the semester. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the specified population of teacher candidates was examined (Denscombe, 2017; Gall et al., 2007). To limit the potential bias that may manifest throughout data collection, all teacher candidates enrolled in their Internship II coursework during the fall and

spring semesters of 2018-2019 were invited to participate (Bullard, 2019). Of the available population of 332 teacher candidates, 113 teacher candidates submitted survey responses. Of the survey responses received, there were 19 unusable responses. This was a result of incomplete submissions or missing demographic information. Incomplete questionnaire submission data was removed prior to any statistical analysis being conducted. Demographic information for the study participants are presented in the tables below.

Table 1*Program Track of Participants*

	<i>n</i>	%
Social Science Education Track	24	25.5
Other Secondary Education Track	17	18.1
Elementary Education Track	53	56.4
Total	94	100.0

Table 2*Gender of Study Participants*

	<i>n</i>	%
Male	17	18.1
Female	74	78.7
Other	3	3.2
Total	94	100.0

Table 3*Student Status of Study Participants*

	<i>n</i>	%
First Generation	40	42.6
Not First Generation	54	57.4
Total	94	100.0

Table 4*Race/Ethnicity of Study Participants*

	<i>n</i>	%
African American	4	4.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	3.2
Caucasian	64	68.1
Latino/Latina	13	13.8
Other/Multiracial	10	10.6
Total	94	100.0

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was the *Civic Attitude and Engagement Survey*, which was developed by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC), in conjunction with a number of other educational organizations, to study the civic attitudes and engagement levels of students in the state of Florida. Some language in the survey was revised in order to address teacher candidates more specifically. The original *Civic Attitude and Engagement Survey* was tested for validity and reliability by the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship. The scales were constructed after factor analyses of the items. Items that did not load significantly on the extracted factor were excluded (D. Dobson, S. Masyada, & K. Kawashima-Ginsberg, personal communication August-December, 2018). As this population differed from the original population studied, the survey was piloted with 23 teacher candidates to ensure the constructs maintained their consistency within the new population. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each construct, as it is a common measure to calculate the internal consistency/reliability within survey items (Field, 2013; Laerd Statistics, 2018; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). The report indicated a high level of internal consistency was maintained ($\alpha > .8$).

Constructs of Interests

Prior to the start of the study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. The questionnaire was distributed to the noted population above following Dillman *et al.*'s (2014) recommended respondent contact strategies. Questions 1-16 included all items relating to teacher candidate's affinity toward civic engagement or positive civic attitudes (See Table 5). Participants were asked to rate their responses to each item on a 5-point Likert scale indicating if they: Strongly disagree (SD), Somewhat disagree (D), Neither agree nor disagree (N), Somewhat agree (A), or

Strongly agree (SA). Each response was given a numerical value on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. All items were coded and a mean score of "civic attitudes" was generated. A higher mean score indicated more positive leaning "civic attitudes" within teacher candidates given responses.

Table 5

Civic Attitudes - Survey Items

1.1	I think people should assist those in their lives who are in need of help
1.2	I think it is important for people to follow rules and laws
1.3	I try to help when I see people in need
1.4	I am willing to help others without being paid
1.5	Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility
1.6	Being concerned about state and local issues is an important responsibility for everybody
1.7	I am interested in political issues
1.8	It is important to me to contribute to my community and society
1.9	People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions
1.10	Musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics that others might find offensive
1.11	Newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of a story
1.12	I believe I can make a difference in my community
1.13	By working with others in the community I can help make things better
1.14	I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics
1.15	Public officials care very much about what people like me think
1.16	I cast an educated vote in the last election.

A total of eight items were included in the construct of teacher candidates' civic knowledge. Each participant received a composite score that was calculated by adding all correct responses together, with the highest score able to be earned being an "8". All questions were multiple choice. Correct responses were coded as a "1" and incorrect responses were coded as "0." A higher composite score indicated a greater propensity for civic knowledge based on the survey questions.

Table 6*Civic Knowledge - Survey Items*

1. Who is the current governor of Florida?
2. In which country has the group called ISIS gained control over some territory?
3. As far as you know, does the federal government spend more on Social Security or on foreign aid?
4. What branch of the government is responsible for determining the constitutionality of US laws?
5. How many US Senators represent each state?
6. According to the US Constitution, who has the power to declare war?
7. Typically, how many Justices sit on the United States Supreme Court?
8. How many terms can a US Congressman serve?

All data collected from the distributed survey was compiled and exported from Qualtrics. Once cleaned, the data was uploaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Software Program (SPSS) version 24. Utilizing descriptives, t-tests, ANOVAs, and the non-parametric alternatives of Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis, and Welch ANOVAs (Field, 2013; Laerd Statistics, 2018; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012), statistical differences within the given demographic/academic variables were analyzed. The choice, to use these measures, was made as a result of the constructs being investigated, the original design of the instrument, and violations of certain assumptions (Field, 2013; Laerd Statistics, 2018; Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). Additionally, descriptives were generated and the mean scores of each item was investigated based on each independent variables displaying statistical significantly differences within the constructs. Results are presented below.

Research Findings

The civic attitudes of teacher candidates were explored based on four key variables: program of study, gender, race, and college student status. The findings of each analysis are presented below.

Civic Attitudes and Civic Knowledge by Program Track

Within the civic attitudes construct, a statistically significant difference was discovered between the social science education teacher candidates (N=24, M=4.44,

SD=.44), other secondary education teacher candidates (N=17, M=4.03, SD=.44), and elementary education teacher candidates (N=53, M=4.05, SD=.49). This finding supports the belief that social studies teachers are more likely to be positively civically inclined (Chin & Barber, 2010; Schugurensky & Myers, 2003), though it is important to note that the mean scores reported in this study show teacher candidates of all content areas and program tracks hold positive civic attitudes. This indicates that teacher candidates in all content areas may already possess the civic dispositions needed to support positive democratic values in the classroom (Gutmann, 1987; Levine, 2014; Levinson, 2007; Schugurensky, & Myers, 2003).

Table 7

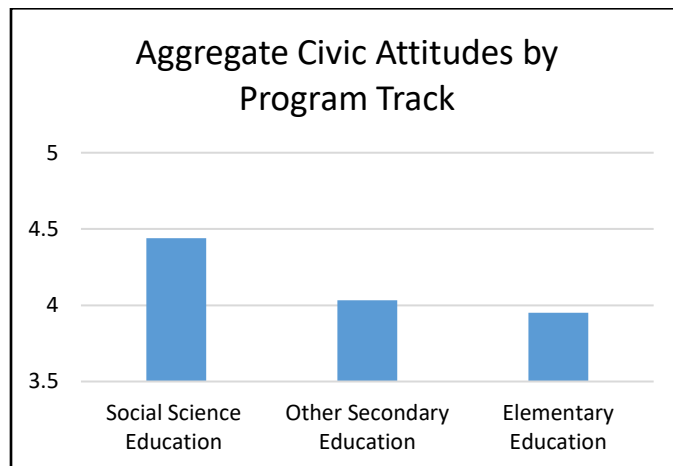
ANOVA - Civic Attitudes Mean Score by Program Track

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	2.760	2	1.380	6.222	.003
Within Groups	20.184	91	.222		
Total	22.944	93			

Note. This data is significant at the .05 level.

Figure 1

Civic Attitudes by Program Track



In the case of civic knowledge by program track, a one-way Welch ANOVA was conducted to compare the civic knowledge of social science education teacher candidates (N=24, M=6.46, SD=.88), other secondary education teacher candidates (N=17, M=4.94, SD=1.64), and elementary education teacher candidates (N=53, M=4.91, SD=1.56). Civic knowledge scores were statistically significantly different

between the different program tracks, as indicated by the results, Welch's $F(2, 39.61) = 17.231, p < .001$.

Table 8

Tukey HSD Post Hoc - Civic Attitudes by Program Track

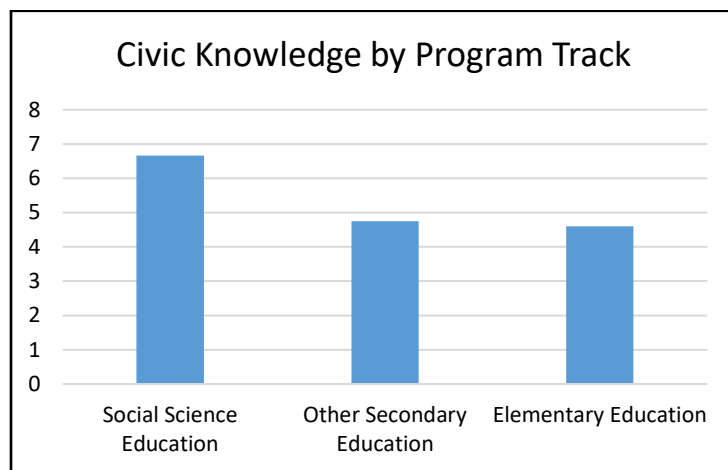
Program Track (J)	Program Track (I)	MD (I-J)	SE	p	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Social Science	Other Secondary	.40731*	.14929	.021	.0516	.7630
	Elementary	.38794*	.11587	.003	.1118	.6640
Other Secondary	Social Science	-.40731*	.14929	.021	-.7630	-.0516
	Elementary	-.01937	.13127	.988	-.3321	.2934
Elementary	Social Science	-.38794*	.11587	.003	-.6640	-.1118
	Other Secondary	.01937	.13127	.988	-.2934	.3321

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Figure 2

Civic Knowledge by Program Track



Civic Attitudes and Civic Knowledge by Gender

There were 74 female and 17 male respondents. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in civic attitudes based on gender. There were no outliers that presented themselves in the data, as assessed by visual inspection of descriptives and boxplots. Mean civic attitude scores for participants were normally distributed, and there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .903$). The t-test found

no statistically significant mean difference in civic attitudes between female teacher candidates ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.49$) and male teacher candidates ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.51$), resulting in a difference of $M = .018$, 95% CI $[-.25, .28]$, $t(89) = .135$, $p = .893$, $d = 0.036$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained; there is no statistically significant difference in teacher candidate civic attitudes based on gender. When using another independent-samples t-test to determine if there were significant differences in aggregate civic knowledge scores within these groups, there was one outlier that presented itself in the data, as assessed by visual inspection of the descriptives and boxplots. The outlier was retained in the analysis. Civic knowledge scores for participants identified as female were not normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p < .05$); though their male counterparts were ($p > .05$) (see Table 20). There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .681$). The t-test found no statistically significant mean difference in the aggregate civic knowledge scores between female teacher candidates ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.56$) and male teacher candidates ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.66$), resulting in a difference of $M = .37$, 95% CI $[-.47, 1.21]$, $t(89) = .878$, $p = .382$, $d = .229$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained; there is no statistically significant difference in teacher candidate's civic knowledge based on gender.

Civic Attitudes and Civic Knowledge by College Student Status

Within the civic attitudes construct, the analysis revealed no statistically significant mean difference ($M = -.17$, 95% CI $[-.19, .22]$, $t(92) = .164$, $p = .870$) based on college student status. This finding was contrasted by the analysis of the civic knowledge construct by student status. An independent samples t-test comparing first generation college students ($N=40$, $M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.59$) and non-first generation college students ($N=54$, $M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.48$) revealed a statistically significant difference in civic knowledge ($M = -.77$, 95% CI $[-1.43, -.16]$, $t(92) = -.250$, $p = .014$). Using the "first generation college student" question as a proxy, this study aligns with the findings of other studies that parental education level and socioeconomic status play a role in future civic actions/attitudes and civic knowledge (Almond & Verba, 1963; Campbell et al., 2012; Levinson, 2012). Reviewing the data, an uneven distribution of civic knowledge appears. The variation in responses based on college student status indicates this disparity reveals itself in almost all questions asked but at varying levels.

Table 5*Independent Samples t-Test – Civic Attitudes Score by College Student Status*

	Levene's Test**		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	p	t	df	p (2-tailed)	MD	SED	95% CI	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.134	.715	-.333	93	.740	-.03774	.11339	-.26290	.18743
Equal variances not assumed			-.324	76.9	.746	-.03774	.11629	-.26931	.19384
				83					

*Difference significant at the .05 level.

** Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

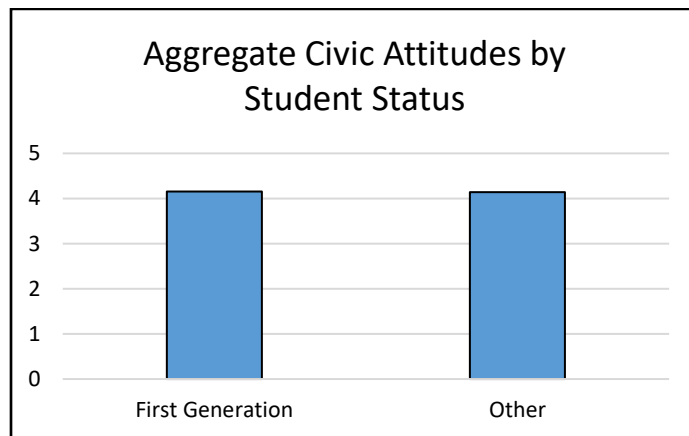
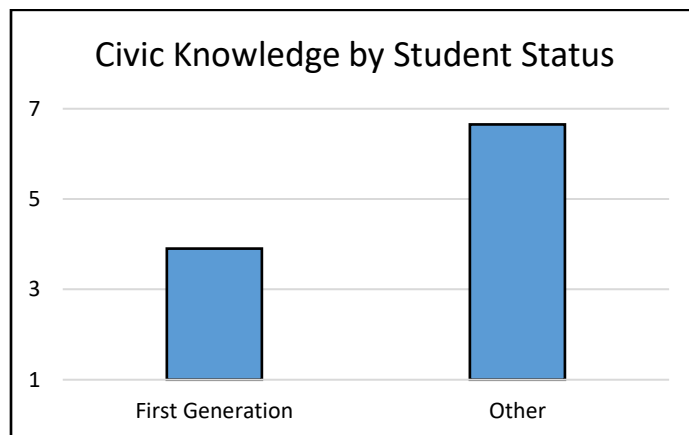
Figure 3*Civic Attitudes by Student Status*

Table 10*Independent Samples t-Test – Civic Knowledge Score by Student Status -*

	Levene's Test**		t-test for Equality of Means						
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)	<i>MD</i>	<i>SED</i>	95%CI	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.065	.305	-2.500	92	.014	-.798	.319	-1.432	-.164
Equal variances not assumed			-2.473	80.591	.016	-.798	.323	-1.440	-.156

*Differences significant at the .05 level.

**Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

Figure 4*Civic Knowledge by Student Status**Civic Attitudes and Civic Knowledge by Race/Ethnicity*

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore if differences presented themselves within the self-reported data. Due to one subgroup presenting as not normally distributed, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to follow up with the ANOVA analysis. Median civic attitudes scores were not statistically significantly different between the self-reported racial/ethnic groups, $\chi^2(4) = 2.927$, $p = .570$. These findings support the notion that teacher candidates, regardless of race/ethnicity, hold generally positive civic attitudes. The number of respondents in each subgroup did limit any assertions that can be made from this data. To compare the civic knowledge of respondents a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted as a non-parametric follow up.

The test indicated there were no statistically significant differences based on the self-reported subgroups of race/ethnicity, $\chi^2(4) = 4.230$, $p = .376$. These findings run counter to other studies that display disparities in a person's civic knowledge based on race/ethnicity (Galston, 2007; Lawless & Fox, 2015; Levinson, 2012). This finding may indicate that teachers/teacher candidates do not align with traditional groupings for unidentified and immeasurable reasons here. Further study and investigation are needed.

Table 11

ANOVA - Civic Attitudes Mean Score by Race/Ethnicity

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	.596	4	.149	.593	.669
Within Groups	22.348	89	.251		
Total	22.944	93			

Limitations of the Study

To provide transparency and clarity the following limitations presented themselves during the study. A threat to the external validity due to the Hawthorne Effect (Adair, 1984; Payne & Payne, 2004) may have manifested. The survey items and results rely on the trustworthiness and honesty of the participants responses, which may also be impacted by a self-enhancement bias. Respondents may overestimate their civic attitudes and dispositions when viewing themselves through the lens of "study participant." Even so, the survey provides a window into the participants own views and attitudes, a snapshot in time if you will. Similarly, language may impact the studies outcome. The field of civic education presents multiple descriptions and iterations of concepts and vocabulary. As such, participants may have interpreted the questions/terms within the instrument in various forms due to their unique lived experiences. Finally, the study was limited in its distribution to one institution within the southeast. This limits the ability to dive deeper into the data and present more generalizable results but presents an opportunity for future research that is more inclusive and expansive regarding population.

Implications and Conclusion

This study explores an important gap within the realms of civic education and teacher preparation. The findings highlight the notion that social science education teacher candidates possess a greater level of civic knowledge than that of the

elementary and other secondary teacher candidates surveyed, supporting the findings of similar research with in-service educational practitioners (Chin & Barber, 2010; Journell, 2013; Schugurensky & Myers, 2003). Despite the fact teacher candidates in all tracks possess generally positive civic attitudes, the disparity in knowledge is concerning. The data collected for this study identifies shortcomings in civic knowledge that may manifest within the future classrooms of the studied teacher candidates. The foundation of many civic skills, such as deliberation, understanding multiple perspectives, and public advocacy, are built in students' formative years of education (Campbell et al., 2012; Levine, 2014; Levinson, 2007). If elementary education teacher candidates are not equipped to build foundational civic skills with young students in their classrooms, and do not possess the base knowledge needed to teach the standards outlined, there is potential for a great number of students to misunderstand the democratic process and for the Civic Empowerment Gap to widen (Levinson, 2012).

Similarly, the findings reveal a stark contrast between first generation college students and their peers. Academically, first generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage compared to students whose parents had previously navigated the higher education setting (Choy, 2001; Mangan, 2015). They are more likely to drop out and tend to struggle academically (Swail, 2014; Ishitani, 2006; Thayer, 2000). This translates into civic action and knowledge – or lack thereof – as education has been found to have an explicit relationship with civic engagement and future civic action (Campbell, 2006; Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Levinson, 2012). The gap in civic knowledge that presented itself in this study demonstrates the prospective need to develop coursework for teacher candidates in civic education, especially those teacher candidates who identify as first-generation college students. As they already show equivalent positive civic attitudes, bolstering civic education could also bolster future engagement (Galston 2001, 2007; Gastil & Xenos, 2010). This implication would also provide K-12 students with teachers who are equipped with both the knowledge and attitudes needed to foster the democratic skills required to support sustained future engagement from within the classroom.

As such, the renewal in civic education can only be maintained if the educators charged with teaching and exemplifying the democratic ideals are prepared. This starts with the colleges and universities tasked with preparing the teacher candidates and preservice educators. Educators need to embody the democratic skills they want their students to display – practicing, modeling, and allowing students to develop the skills necessary to become participatory citizens

themselves. Especially in a state where new reforms and political measures are impacting classrooms and institutions of higher learning on a day-to-day basis. With the newly established push for civics and government at the college level, these findings serve as an important baseline for study. A shift in focus may also be needed in the K-12 schools, which have focused heavily on math, science, and literacy in lieu of civic education. Modifying the adage "Every teacher is a reading teacher" to "Every teacher is a civics teacher" and supporting teacher candidates in understanding their position as "democratic role models" may help exemplify the importance of preparing teacher candidates for the role they all hold as citizens within the Republic.

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