

DESIGNING HIGH-IMPACT LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND USING MEANINGFUL METRICS TO ASSESS THEM

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1. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS: SOCIAL DIVIDES ENDANGER EDUCATION

What is higher education's role in addressing the deepening gaps and inequality in our society? Widening cultural and economic gaps fuel class-based social divides and produce inequitable educational opportunities. There is a sense of urgency at colleges and universities to insure fair and balanced access to high quality education for all students. It should be no surprise that the 2016 Association of American Colleges & Universities Annual Meeting's theme was "*How Higher Education Can Lead—On Equity, Inclusive Excellence, and Democratic Renewal.*" High-Impact Learning is featured as one of the tools to do this.

High-Impact Learning focuses on active and collaborative courses which explore “big questions” in history cultures, science, and society. These courses “get real” and use shared “*intellectual experiences*” with timely issues, to connect college and university students with diverse communities and peoples. *High-Impact Learning* has the potential to build civic engagement, strengthening student’s adaptability, teamwork and ethical judgment — preparing students to actively participate in a shifting and changing civic society

2. MEANINGFUL METRICS AND MEASURING VALUE: HARDWIRED

Measurement as a function of gain, improvement or increased value has been a part of our culture from the beginning. It may be hard-wired to access and record transformation over time because the type of learning it produces is tied so deeply to individual and group survival.

Petroglyphs from [Häljesta](#), Sweden. Nordic [Bronze Age](#) show possible examples of this with ten human figures increasing in size from right to left as a record of growth or hierarchy. In the ancient Middle East of the 8th millennium, a clay envelope or “Bulla” and clay tokens were used to measure and track the quantity of animals and food traded.



Figure 1. Petroglyphs from [Häljesta](#), Sweden. Nordic [Bronze Age](#)

Figure 2. Ancient Middle East of the 8th millennium, a clay envelope or “Bulla” and clay tokens

3. RUBRICS AND GRADING: ACCESSING AND RECORDING LEARNING

“Grading” as an educational measurement tool may have originated in the eighteenth century. George W. Pierson, a Yale historian writes:

“According to tradition, the first grades issued at Yale (and possibly the first in the country) were given out in the year 1785, when President Ezra Stiles, after examining 58 Seniors, recorded in his diary that there were Twenty Optimis, sixteen second Optimis, twelve Inferiores (Bonis), ten Pejores.”

Originally the term “Rubric” was used to define and articulate medical diagnoses and related procedures. By the 1970’s the term rubric started being used in the field of education when the *New York State’s Regents Exam* employed rubrics as a tools to support Regent “raters” who measured and evaluated the quality of examination writing. More fair and less biased assessment was hoped for, as all students was graded using the same set of writing performance standard.



Figure 3. College in the 1970's, [Ed Uthman/Flickr](#)

4. THE BEGINNING OF HIGH IMPACT LEARNING COMMUNITIES

In 2008 George D. Kuh, Founding Director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, began writing about *High-Impact Learning* in his paper “*High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter.*” At that point, *High-Impact Learning* was at its beginning. Evidence of them might have been seen in learning communities, first year seminars and collaborative assignments. In 2008, Otis College President Sami Hoi shepherded a new academic initiative involving innovative partnerships and community engagement called “*Integrated Learning*” (currently called, “Creative Action”). Hoi seized the opportunity to test the theory that could begin to level the playing field for underserved students. With Otis College’s percentage of Pell Grants (A Pell Grant is a subsidy the U.S. federal government provides for students who need it to pay for college.) hovering at or about 40%, he had the perfect laboratory.

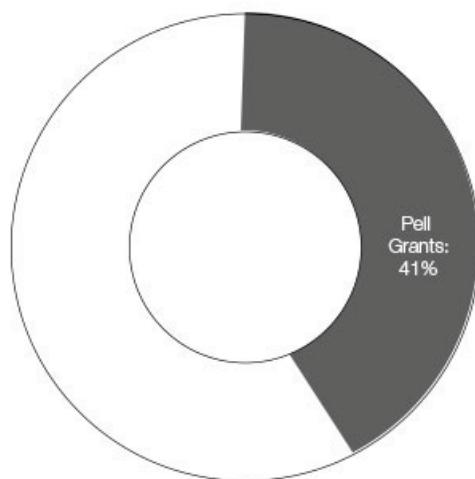


Figure 4. Forty-one percent of Otis College of Art and Design undergraduate, domestic students receive Pell Grants. (May 2017, FY16)

This case study focuses on NEIGHBOR-GAP-BRIDGE: “*Bullies, Teasers and Tormenters: Design for Fairness and Equity*”, a course taught in Fall 2016 at Otis College of Art and Design in the Creative Action department. This *High-Impact Learning* environment was designed for maximum civic impact by synchronizing it with the 2016 election. It introduced students to a variety of assessment and metrics used

by those both inside and outside of education. Combining the potential of both *High-Impact Learning* and Rubrics, this class posed the following questions:

1. *What if students, faculty and course partners collaborated to develop their own assessment tool to identify and measure civic behavior in the tumultuous climate surrounding the fall 2016 election?*
2. *If “We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us,” might this new tool, reshape our class team environment and those in our community who encounter it?*

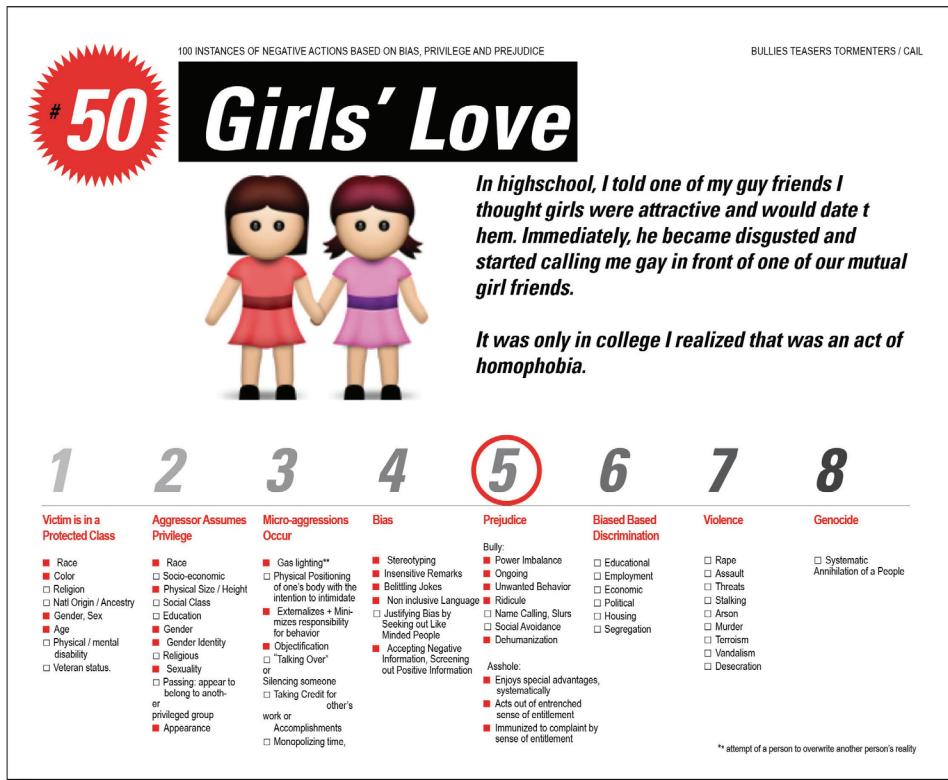


Figure 5. Prototype of civic engagement assessment tool developed in “Bullies, Teasers and Tormenters: *Design for Fairness and Equity*” for Midterm exhibition. Mapped on a scale from 1- 8, each Instance asks us to consider a behavior’s contribution to the overall building of bias, privilege or prejudice.

5. LEARNING “COLLISIONS” THAT GET STUDENT ATTENTION: THE 2016 ELECTION AND “NEIGHBOR GAP BRIDGE”

NEIGHBOR-GAP-BRIDGE is a Global Community Building initiative, as well as a Creative Action Course at Otis College, focused on Civic Engagement. The course is designed as a laboratory and views a student's role as ethnographer and the college's surrounding environment as tribe. Using pedagogical tools for observation and inquiry, students actively investigate the customs, history, attitudes and peoples – in their own backyard.

Helping to prepare students for their public lives as citizens, community members, and professionals is a key deliverable of the NEIGHBOR-GAP-BRIDGE course. "Bridges" are *common intellectual experiences*, selected for relevancy, which sometimes coincide with significant current events.

6. BULLIES, TEASERS AND TORMENTORS

With the fall 2016 election as a backdrop, and the support of course partners including best-selling author, Aaron James, "*Assholes, a Theory*," and The Anti- Defamation League, Otis College students began to study the people we most needed to understand in an election environment like that of 2016: Bullies, Teasers and Tormentors.

By fall 2016 the election campaign had reached a tipping point with entitlement, privilege and narcissistic behavior everywhere. There was a growing fear that our social fabric was un-raveling and documented evidence of decline. Following is the fall 2016 course description / "Call to Action."

Entitlement and narcissistic behavior seem everywhere these days. We try to avoid people who exhibit this kind of behavior but they seem to be all over the place—on the playground, at school, at work, at home, on the road as well as all over our social and public sphere. We struggle to comprehend why these people behave like that. They seem to be collectively un-raveling our social fabric with documented evidence of a decline in meaningful and fair connection and engagement. Work with us to build a bridge to social fairness and justice.

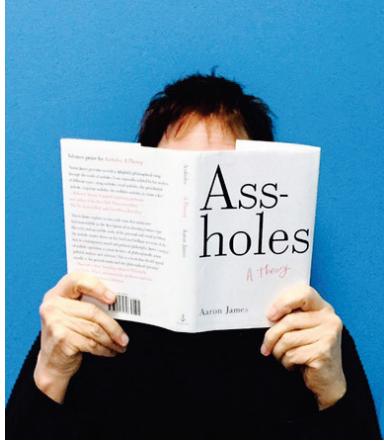


Figure 6. A multi-disciplinary lens is core to the Neighbor Gap Bridge pedagogy. Best selling author, [Aaron James, "Assholes, a Theory."](#) was one of the fall 2016 guests. As a Professor in Philosophy at University of California, Irvine, James helped students gain perspective on some of the people we most need to understand in an election like this: *Bullies, Teasers and Tormentors.*

7. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT VALUE RUBRIC ANALYSIS

The academic assessment rubric used for this 15-week course was the [AACU Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric](#). Following is a summary of the six assessment categories.

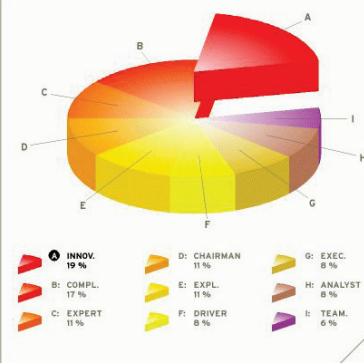
Rubric Category	Index Span Summary
1. Diversities of Communities and Cultures	<p>From: Student indifference to active engagement and the ability</p> <p>To: Student promotes other's civic engagement.</p>
2. Analysis of Knowledge	<p>From: Student knowledge base limited to one's own</p> <p>To: Student is able to bridge to civic projects and identify new patterns and insights.</p>
3. Civic Identity and Commitment	From little or no experience or interest to student transformation and commitment <i>to civic engagement.</i>

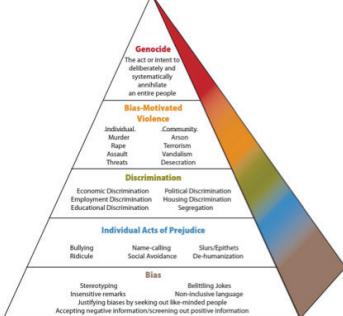
4. Civic Communication	<p>From: Student adapts ideas and communication based on others' perspectives</p> <p>To: Student tailors communication strategies and establishes relationships to further civic communication.</p>
5. Civic Action and Reflection	<p>From: Student experiments with some civic activities</p> <p>To: Student engages in independent activities and initiatives incorporating insight and analysis.</p>
6. Civic Contexts and Structures	<p>From: Student tries out a few civic contexts and structures</p> <p>To: Student works across and with community contexts collaboratively</p>

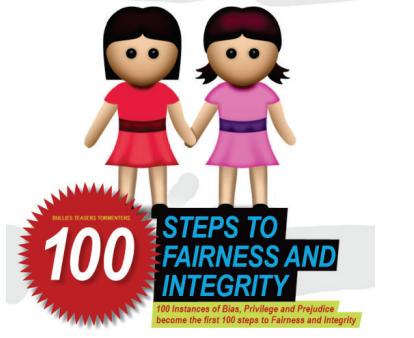
8. ASSESS, YES. BUT ‘FRONT LOAD’ THE COURSE WITH IMPACTFUL EXPERIENCES, ALIGNED WITH THE ASSESSMENT VEHICLE

An active learning environment for students to discover the “value” of assessment itself in building a more civil society was embedded in this 15-week semester. An active “process focused” environment was crafted, addressing millennial and post-millennial learning preferences. The building blocks of this course included testing tools like the [NY Times Empathy Test](#), innovative bias identification tools from the Anti-Defamation League, reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, community observation, classic philosophical reasoning, and educational rubrics.

Week	Tool	Description

1	Existing Knowledge and Commitment Baseline	What do you already know? What do you want to know? Deep listening and recording determine student's existing civic knowledge base and areas of interests.	<p><i>"I guess my civic identity has always kind of been as an observer or a sharer but never really as an active participant.</i></p> <p><i>I talk about problems I have with the world and people but the most I ever really seem to do is make donations, share information and complain."</i></p>									
	NY Times Empathy Test	Are you tuned-in to the emotions of others? This test uses photos of eyes with a variety of emotional interpretation options for response.										
2	Team Role Test	<p>Based on the team roles theory, this test determines which team roles best suit team members.</p> <p>1 Innovator 2 Completer 3 Chairman 4 Executive 5 Explainer 6 Analyst 7 Expert 8 Driver 9 Team Player</p>	 <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>● INNOV. 19 %</td> <td>D: CHAIRMAN 11 %</td> <td>G: EXEC. 8 %</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B: COMPL. 17 %</td> <td>E: EXPL. 11 %</td> <td>H: ANALYST 8 %</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C: EXPERT 11 %</td> <td>F: DRIVER 8 %</td> <td>I: TEAM. 6 %</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	● INNOV. 19 %	D: CHAIRMAN 11 %	G: EXEC. 8 %	B: COMPL. 17 %	E: EXPL. 11 %	H: ANALYST 8 %	C: EXPERT 11 %	F: DRIVER 8 %	I: TEAM. 6 %
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Are You a Narcissist?	"For each pair of items, choose the one that you most identify with. If you identify with both equally, choose which one you think is most important."	<p><input type="radio"/> I am no better or worse than most people. <input checked="" type="radio"/> I think I am a special person.</p>										
3	Defining "Asshole" Deep Dive/ group "Hive Mind" exercise	Aaron James, author of "Assholes a Theory" works with class to develop criteria for defining terms like bully, narcissist and asshole, based on classic philosophical measures for ethical behavior.										
4	Community/ Media Probe: Bullies, Teasers and Tormentors/ Identify Instances	Using semi-structured community interviews, participant observation and media research, students begin to identify instances of bullying and narcissistic behavior. Students observe patterns and levels of expression of these behaviors.	<p><i>"At this point I feel like all I need to say is 'grab them by the pussy' and everyone knows exactly what I'm talking about.</i></p> <p><i>Donald's white male privilege makes him biased when it comes to understanding how his comments may be seen as inappropriate or promoting "rape culture".</i></p>									

5	<u>Anti Defamation League Training/</u> Pyramid of Hate	Anti-Defamation league training session with class includes the "Pyramid of Hate", a tool using metric and sequence to demonstrate how behaviors can escalate — from bias to genocide.	 <p>The diagram illustrates the "Pyramid of Hate" with five levels of increasing severity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genocide: The act or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire people. Bias-Motivated Violence: Individual, Murder, Rape, Assault, Threats; Community, Arson, Terrorism, Vandalism, Desecration. Discrimination: Economic Discrimination, Employment Discrimination, Educational Discrimination. Individual Acts of Prejudice: Bullying, Harassment, Name-calling, Social Avoidance, Slurs/Epinths, De-humanization. Bias: Stereotyping, Insensitive remarks, Justifying biases by seeking out like-minded people, Accepting negative information/Screening out positive information. 																		
6	<u>Anti Defamation League Training/</u> Privilege Pie Chart	Assess privilege by assembling eight of your own privilege categories. Share and reflect on the status associated with each category. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Have a home computer 2 Ancestors from Europe 3 Female 4 Considered tall 5 Not on honor roll 6 Outgoing 7 Member of Christian religion 8 Gay, lesbian, bisexual 	<p>"I am White, Black and Asian and there is privilege associated with each of these."</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Privilege Category</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>White</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asian</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Black</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hispanic</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Christian Religion</td> <td>8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Privilege Category	Count	White	1	Asian	2	Black	3	Hispanic	4	Female	5	Male	6	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	7	Christian Religion	8
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7	Rubric Development / Prototype	Inspired by course research and guest speakers, begin to craft a rubric to use to identify and assess 100 instances of bullying and narcissistic behavior. <p>Use semi-structured community interviews to ask our community to define bias terms used in our research.</p>	<p>Student #5: Communication Arts</p> <p>Bully: people who are very insecure but pretend that they are not. They use force to do mean things to others</p> <p>Troll: pranks, funny pranks not as bad as bully, use the words to tease people, sarcastic, not as too much impact on other people</p> <p>Asshole: described ex-boyfriend, person with no manner, inconsiderate</p> <p>Entitled: somebody who is really spoiled brat, childish, and gives order to other people to do things</p> <p>Narcissist: people cares too much about his/her looks, use appearance to get whatever they want</p>																		
8	Rubric Refinement	Director of Marketing, Associate Provost and faculty work with class, to wordsmith bias scenarios and maximize impact of communication. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crafting headlines • Developing impactful visuals • Organizing information • Naming and Nomenclature 																			

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing craft 	<p>"I was in the DMV, I asked a women who worked there for clarification on the document that I needed to filled out. She was impatient and rude. My native language is Chinese, and I need her to explain to me more careful and slowly."</p>
9	Otis Community Exhibition Midterm/ Community Research and Rubric Share	Present 100 Instances of bullying and narcissistic behavior to Otis Community in a "Pop-up" Midterm exhibition.	 
10	Otis Community Response/ Video Interviews	<p>Use video interview to measure impact of community exhibition.</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/neighborgapbridge/videos/115427453466790</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/neighborgapbridge/videos/115425541133648</p>	 <p>"Sometimes it is so hard to put into words <i>"What is decent?"</i> <i>"What is to be an asshole?"</i> but here, it's all written down and you can mark off what's at play." <i>"I feel more inclined to "check myself" after reading some of these."</i></p>
	Student Reflection/ Building a Cooperative Environment		<p>"Everyone cooperated. It was weird because when we started it was kind of like the entire class working together but as we got into installing things, people broke into smaller groups and focused on things that they were good at, and we became really efficient— kind of effortlessly. <i>It was like the ants in the video where everyone just kind of worked together to do what was best for the team.</i>"</p>

11 13 14	Final Project Development	Overheard during final project development	"Before this class, I couldn't even say the word "Vagina" let alone identify gender bias problems and work with a team member to design a creative, guerrilla response to combat them."
15	AACU VALUE Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric Creative Action Course Evaluations Final Project Share		

9. VALUE RUBRIC RESULTS

On week 15, students completed the *AACU Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric* to assess civic engagement measures from week 1 (yellow) to week 15 (red). According to the rubric, the overall increase in civic engagement from week 1 to week 15 was 44%. The top performing individual rubric categories were category 2 “Analysis of Knowledge” and category 3 “Civic Identity and Commitment”, each increasing by 53%.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT VALUE RUBRIC			
for more information, please contact sales@aacu.org			
<p>Definition <i>Civic engagement is “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” (Excerpted from <i>Civic Responsibility and Higher Education</i>, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000, Preface, page vi.) In addition, civic engagement encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community.</i></p> <p>Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.</p>			
Category	Milestone	Benchmark	
Diversity of Communities and Cultures	1 Demonstrates evidence of working with own attitudes and beliefs because of working with others from three different cultures and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes other's engagement with diversity.	2 Reflects on how own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. Exhibits curiosity about what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.	3 Has awareness that own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. Exhibits little curiosity about what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.
Analysis of Knowledge	1 Demonstrates evidence of working with others from three different cultures and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes other's engagement with diversity.	2 Analyzes knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline making relevant connections to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	3 Analyzes knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline making relevant connections to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.
Civic Identity and Commitment	1 Provides examples of evidence in civic engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a reinforced and clarified sense of commitment to one's own participation in civic action.	2 Provides examples of evidence in civic engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a reinforced and clarified sense of commitment to one's own participation in civic action.	3 Provides examples of evidence in civic engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a growing sense of civic identity and commitment.
Civic Communication	1 Selects communication strategies to effectively express, listen, and adapt to others to establish relationships to further civic action.	2 Effectively communicates in civic contexts, showing ability to do all of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.	3 Effectively communicates in civic contexts, showing ability to do more than one of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.
Civic Action and Reflection	1 Describes leadership in new citizenship or community service and multiple civic engagement activities that are accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one's actions.	2 Demonstrates independent experience and leadership in civic actions with reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one's actions.	3 Has clearly purposeful in civically focused actions and begins to reflect or describe how these actions may benefit individual(s) or communities.
Civic Contexts/Structures	1 Demonstrates ability and commitment to collaborate with others and within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim.	2 Demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim.	3 Demonstrates experience identifying tensional ways to participate in civic contexts and structures.

Figure 7. Students were asked to use the VALUE rubric to assess civic engagement levels week 1 (yellow) and week 15 (red) in six separate categories

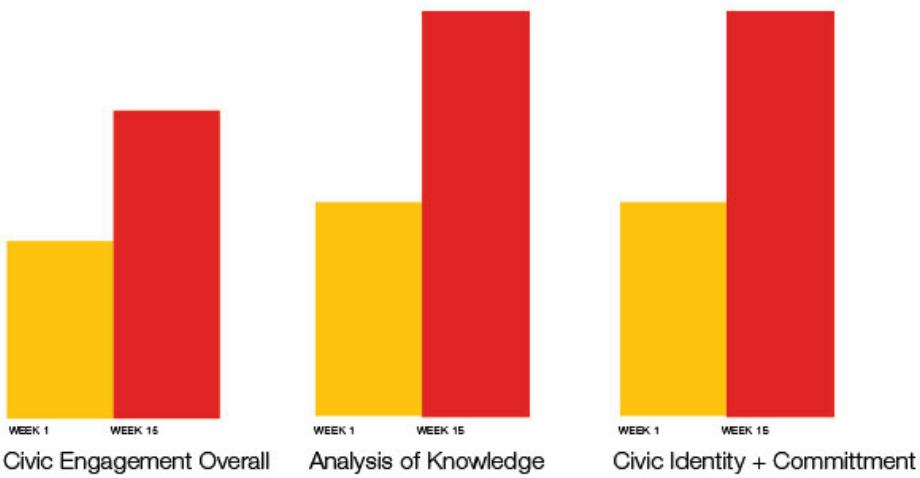


Figure 8. VALUE rubric results

10. HIGH-IMPACT LEARNING: NOT JUST FOR THE “UNDERSERVED”

Although *High-Impact Learning*’s original intention was to “level the playing field” and support a marginalized student community, it holds the potential to serve all learners. Shared intellectual experience around a powerful “Call to Action” build community and purpose. Most instructors experience a growing and alarming crisis of classroom attention concerns. Students nodding off, sleeping, gazing distractedly, texting, or working on projects and papers for an unrelated class, are our daily nemesis. The shared IMPACT of *High Impact Learning* has the power to wake up students (and instructors.) They can shift focus away from a *teaching-centered paradigm* toward a *student-centered paradigm*. Visual, auditory and even kinesthetic needs of Millennial and Post-Millennial students can be met. “Googling” (at which Millennial and Post- Millennial students excel) becomes purposeful when students assume the leadership position of “researcher”, “data miner”, “stakeholder” and “game changer.”

11. FINAL THOUGHTS: TACKLING BIG QUESTIONS BUILD CIVIL SOCIETIES

Inquiry, curiosity and authentic engagement are tantamount to success whether you are a student or professional. Anya Kamenetz, author of *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education* suggest that “Instructors should teach what they don’t know.” Perhaps Kamenetz is suggesting that we use the classroom as a tool to consider unfamiliar content, that might spark new context and meaningful engagement. Some of what fueled the success of this course was that instructors, course partners and

students gathered around a timely “Problem” that none of us understood and all of us needed to tackle. The stakes were so high that we were able to sublimate our individual needs, and join together for a short time to engage civically. Our thoughts, actions and behavior are as measurable as knowledge acquisition. Metrics can be crafted and used to keep things more fair, inclusive and equitable whether it's for a college course or a political campaign or a community.

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Patricia Kovic is part of the creative team at [Facility](#), a brand and design consultancy in Los Angeles, as well as a Professor at [Otis College of Art and Design](#), where she focuses on a successful interdisciplinary teaching practice through the Product Design, Artist Community and Teaching and Creative Action programs. She is lead faculty for the [Creative Action](#) course [NEIGHBOR GAP BRIDGE](#), which has received a [Design Ignites Change Award](#), given to designers and architects who want to make a difference. Ms. Kovic was awarded the Teaching Artist in Residence at the [Skirball Cultural Center](#), in conjunction with the Library of Congress exhibition "Creating the United States." Patricia enjoys writing about Experimental, Educational Innovation and has published and presented her ideas in a variety of venues, including [AICAD](#) and [IDSA](#). Ms. Kovic received her BFA from SUNY Buffalo and pursued graduate studies in painting at Brooklyn College.

