



Mississippi State University

Democracy’s Colleges: Contributing to Civic Engagement, Volunteering, and National Service

What is the background for this study?

Community colleges, often referred to as “democracy’s” colleges, offer nonselective admissions and access, educating nearly 40% of all undergraduates. The students are more likely to be first-generation/minority and have lower incomes than students enrolling at selective admission colleges. These student demographics are highly correlated with lower civic participation, yet insufficient research exists on community college civic engagement. The study investigates the relationship between community college attendance or credential completion and civic engagement or volunteering outcomes, how opportunities for civic engagement vary by community college type and geography across the United States, how AmeriCorps recruits and places members in community colleges, and how the AmeriCorps stipend and benefits impact student financial aid awards.

What are the research questions?

The study broadly examines community colleges' current and potential contributions to civic engagement, volunteering, and AmeriCorps national service. The four research questions that guide the study include:

1. What is the relationship between community college attendance/credential attainment, employment outcomes, and civic engagement/volunteering?
2. How does AmeriCorps engage with community colleges in recruitment and placement?
3. How does civic engagement/volunteering vary by community college type and geography?
4. How do AmeriCorps benefits and stipends impact student financial aid awards?

What data and methods are used in this study?

The study uses a mixed-methods research design to address the four research questions (RQs). To answer RQ1, researchers use a quantitative approach incorporating a multivariate regression model to analyze publicly available data from the 2021 U.S. Census Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement (CPS CEV) dataset to determine the relationship between level of educational attainment/employment type associated with community college credentials (degree, diploma, certificate) and

Study At-A-Glance

Study Title
Democracy’s Colleges: Expanding Civic Engagement, Volunteering, and National Service

Researchers
Carol Cutler White, PhD
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Grant Cohort 2022

Timeline 2022-2025

Study Location Starkville, MS

Study Topic Area(s)
Economic Opportunity and Employment
Education Across the Life Course
Social Equity
Volunteering, Nonprofit Studies, and National Service

civic life or volunteering outcomes. For RQ2, researchers use qualitative interviewing of both AmeriCorps and community college representatives with current AmeriCorps grants. For RQ3, researchers construct a nationwide database of over 1,000 community colleges and administer a survey. Analysis of response data include exploratory factor analysis to develop a typology of community colleges' civic engagement. For RQ4, researchers use a qualitative approach, including content analysis of information available on public websites and interviews with college financial aid representatives, to explore how AmeriCorps stipends and benefits might impact a student's financial aid package.

What are potential opportunities to apply study findings and/or build on this research?

This study documents differences in levels of civic engagement across some college/no degree, two-year degree, and four-year degree completion. AmeriCorps can use findings from this study and the resultant RQ3 dataset to focus targeted outreach and recruitment. The comprehensive output from the study can inform AmeriCorps' approach recruiting community college students as members and community colleges as program sites. Because community colleges are the "college of the community," outreach and engagement can reach potential volunteers across the adult lifespan. State and National recruiters can use the *Guide to AmeriCorps Programs for Community Colleges* compiled by the research team in Year 3. Lastly, AmeriCorps can use the research findings to guide future civic engagement and volunteering research priorities to focus equity and inclusion efforts on lower-income, minority, and immigrant populations at community colleges; to increase advocacy for community college civic engagement; and to create a plan for recruitment of community colleges for national service initiatives.

For more information on the study:

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About AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Research Grants

AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation holds grant competitions to foster scholarly research on civic health, address knowledge gaps in civic engagement and volunteerism, and identify new ideas and methodological approaches to service.

- Learn more about [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Research Grants](#).
- See a [Snapshot of Research Grantee Activities and Insights](#).
- Explore the [AmeriCorps Open Data Research Grantee Dataset](#).

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America. For more information on this study and other studies funded by AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, please contact evaluation@americorps.gov.

About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. **Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://www.americorps.gov).**