Chapter 3
The Role of Mentoring in Promoting Civic Engagement

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the concerns and challenges that most college millennials face in today's technology-savvy society. Existing research indicates that college students are having interactions both inside and outside of their respective campus environs that are influencing their civic-mindedness and shaping their engagement in civic action. The role of faculty is to assist students' understanding and reflecting upon their civic engagement and how to document and share their contributions, plans and questions with others and themselves. Faculty instructors are transparent with their students around their own approaches and challenges in the area of civic engagement. As a result, students learn strategies and approaches that may be useful after they finish their first year of college and plan for continued engagement over their time in college and beyond.

Peer mentor approach would probably be better. Sometimes it's hard when you know the TA's only a year older than you. I sometimes don't like the (TAs) authoritative role that they take, rather than the friend approach. – First-year student

INTRODUCTION

On college campuses across the country millennials are having interactions within and outside of the classroom that are shaping their civic-mindedness and engagement to varying degrees of participation. College students are becoming involved in civic protests for injustices that are continuing to occur to members of their community and beyond. A prime example is the Black Lives Matter Movement that has ushered in well-organized protests across many college and universities in America and abroad. For students of color and their white ally peers the police brutality has come to the world's attention thanks to videos on the news and social media of the unjust harassment and killing of Black males and females regardless of age, class, and other categorizing factors. It has opened the eyes of many millennials to the realities of racism in modern times and the multitude of ways it continues to manifest in our society. Racial profiling is not new and can be traced back to chattel slavery in the United States. For today's millennials, the world's injustices are just a click away due to technology and for many of them the desire to take action in real time is present internally, however, the tools they may need to do so are often unavailable, and can lead to frustration and a debilitating lack of engagement. Some millennials feel helpless regarding what to do to make contributions within their immediate community and find it much easier to virtually engage in social activism and civic-engagement.

This was the situation many of the millennials faced a few years ago in our linked courses. At the time the media was filled with images of police brutality and citizens protesting against it. One situation in particular was occurring in Ferguson, Missouri after the killing of an unarmed eighteen-year-old Black youth, Michael Brown by a police officer. The resulting protests and resulting riots over this injustice had seized the world's attention. Ironically, a few months later, the riot happened near our campus surrounding Pumpkinfest. The situation thrusted our college into the media spotlight because of the seemingly ridiculous riot that happened "over pumpkins", and not any direct societal injustice or death at the hands of the police. On social media, many commented on the two different stories and images. Unlike the weeks-long protest and riot that occurred in Ferguson, the Keene riot on the day of Pumpkinfest lasted only a few hours. The destruction was unlike anything that the small rural city of Keene and Keene State College had ever seen. The police were in riot gear and the destruction was devastating to the

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