UNIV 1200 – Citizen Leader 101

This seminar explores various manifestations of leadership and civic engagement – from volunteerism through to voting, and grassroots movements to alternative politics – and the factors that prevent or promote active participation in civic life. This is a course in action. We explore citizenship and leadership themes by investigating local, national and global issues of social significance. An integrated service experience, class discussion, regular analysis of mass media coverage, a diverse range of invited guests, and social observation ground our investigation of this complex topic.

With a small number of students in the class, there is plenty of opportunity for discussion and one-on-one learning.

Concepts and Issues Covered:
- Leadership
- Youth civic engagement
- Current events pertaining to major themes (i.e. Aboriginal rights)
- Volunteering (skills learned in class are put to the test through designated placements of your choice)
- Critical reflection through written journals (think of this as a scholarly diary)
- Discussions (active participation is a key component of this course)
- Group work (two projects: one focusing on leadership theory and one on barriers to youth civic engagement)

Civic Engagement

Civic Literacy

One of the primary predictors of civic participation is civic literacy – the knowledge and ability capacity of citizens to make sense of their political world (Milner, 2002).
- The more education an individual has the more likely it is that person will engage in civic life and vote (Putnam, 1995, 2000; Blais, 2000; Dalton, 1996; Franklin 1996; Oppenhius, 1995; Teixeira, 1992; Verba, Lehman Scholzman, and Brady, 1995).
- Knowledge should lead to both skills in interpreting political communication and to dispositions favouring actual involvement in conventional citizenship behaviour, especially voting on the basis of candidates’ issue positions (Torney-Purta, 2002).
- The real threat to democracy... lies not in young citizens choosing not to vote, but in their lack of the basic knowledge and skills required to make that choice on an informed basis (Milner, 2002).

Voter Turnout Rates
- Prior to 1993 turnout rates were typically between 70-80% (Elections Canada).
- Official voter turn rate in Canadian Federal elections (Elections Canada):
  - 1984: 75.3%
  - 2000: 61.2%
  - 2004: 60.9%
  - 2006: 64.7%
  - 2008: 58.3%
  - 2011: 61.1%
- General Population
  - 2008: 37.4%
  - 2011: 38.8%

Youth voter turnout hovered around 40% with a slight spike in 2006.
- Social media is being leveraged to encourage youth to educate themselves and vote (through websites such as Apathy is Boring and Rock the Vote; and in political campaigns for Obama and, more recently, Justin Trudeau).

Voting Trends
- Voter turnout has declined in Canada since 1984.
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One Indicator of Civic Literacy: Pass the Mock Canadian Citizenship Test!

The Dominion-Historica Institute of Canada is an organization dedicated to Canadian "history", "identity" and "citizenship". The Dominica Institute (formed in 1997) and Historica Foundation of Canada (launched in October 1999) merged in September 2009. This organization strives to make Canadian citizens active and informed by gaining knowledge of Canada's history. This is achieved through their many school programs, public opinion research and interactive media. These methods help Canadians to connect with their country's history, values, politics and citizenship (https://www.historica-dominion.ca/).

The Dominion-Historica Institute administered a Mock Citizenship Test as a means to gauge Canadians' level of civic knowledge in 1997 and 45% failed the test. When administered again ten years later, 60% of Canadians did not have the basic knowledge required to pass.

If you wrote the test, would YOU pass?