Final Report on the Project Citizen Experiment

Conducted and Analyzed by Honors Students in the HONS 2850 Service Learning Practicum

CSU Stanislaus
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Introduction

Project Citizen Division of Labor:
Facilitators, Survey, and Research Teams

Developing a Survey Instrument:

A team of students in the CSU Stanislaus Honors Program developed three sub-groups to distribute the work of this project: a survey development team, a team of facilitators, and a research team to process and report on the survey feedback. The charge of the survey team was to develop questions for a survey instrument that could be used to assess the impact of the facilitator’s participation in this project, and which could help gauge the civic attitudes of students at the three school sites, and to help assess the impact of the Project Citizen experiment on these students. The first pages of the survey posed ten questions regarding personal attitudes, and the second page posed five questions to gauge the pre-and post-levels of student understanding regarding key elements emphasized in the Project Citizen curriculum. The survey is included at the end of this report, and summary analysis of student feedback is included within the report.

Facilitator Roles and Objectives:

The students who comprised the facilitator teams were assigned the tasks of working with faculty and students at school sites A, B, and C. Initially, it was assumed these facilitators were to take supporting roles in the project, with site faculty steering the general direction of their students’ involvement in Project Citizen. In reality, the role of our facilitators evolved at two of the sites, though it remained stable at the third site.

Each group of facilitators met with students at least three times from the inception of the project to its conclusion. During this time, facilitators met with the students to introduce some themes and topics relevant to the project, to offer an overview of concepts related to community service and public policy, and to discuss the scope of the project. The next step was to lead students through the Project Citizen process for developing a project issue and formulating an action plan for proposing changes in public policy. To help assess the impact of our participation in this project, the facilitators distributed and collected surveys at all three sites, with questions concerning student attitudes toward civic participation and the scope of their knowledge about community service and public policy; two of the sites were given post-surveys to evaluate possible shifts in student attitudes and knowledge at the completion of Project Citizen.

Survey and Research Team Roles and Objectives:

The CSU Stanislaus students who comprised the survey and research teams formulated the surveys distributed by the facilitator teams and then tabulated and produced a summary analysis of the results. One survey and research team was assigned to school sites A and B, while a second team was assigned to analyze site C. After reviewing the collected data, both teams drew conjectures from the results pertaining to shifts in student attitudes about community service and public policy produced as a direct result of their involvement in Project Citizen.

Several facilitators and members of the survey and research teams attended the Showcase Day on May 4, 2005, at which students from each of the school sites presented their final projects, using poster boards developed by their classmates to display their policy issues and proposed recommendations for policy initiatives.
First Facilitator’s Reflections: School Site A

Our Goal:
The goal of Project Citizen is to help students identify ways in which they can become involved in their community. Specifically, the program is designed to review how new policies are created and how existing ones may be changed.

Day One:
I arrived at Site-A on a Friday just before 4:00 pm. I had only a vague idea of what to expect. I assumed my role would be supportive and that an instructor at the school would initially present the Project Citizen program to the students. I did not know the number of students with which I would be working or the amount of material that we were to cover on the first day.

Shortly after walking into the school’s cafeteria, I realized my assumptions were incorrect. The director of the after-school program informed us that the students had not yet been introduced to Project Citizen and that it would be entirely up to us to introduce and teach the materials. We were surprised but not overwhelmed, as we all had a relatively good understanding of the first stage in the process – identifying a need within the students’ community – and we had brought along two dozen copies of the Project Citizen work books.

After calling the students into the cafeteria, many of whom had been playing outside when we arrived, we introduced ourselves and began explaining the program. For the most part, twenty or so students listened as Brett gave an overview of what we hoped to accomplish. When Phil began asking questions about what they believed we meant by the words “policy” and “community,” many of the students continued to respond with interest. They agreed that we all belong to more than one community (e.g. school, neighborhood, country, etc.), and they all seemed to agree that each community had problems which needed to be addressed.

The first real sign of boredom and/or resistance came when I began passing out a survey addressing their confidence in voicing their opinion within their community. A few of the more vocal students asked if they had to take it, and I assured them that it was only fifteen easy questions with no right answers. One boy responded, that’s “fifteen questions too many.” Within ten minutes, though, most everyone had settled down and completed the survey.

Our next task was to break into three small groups and consider potential policy changes that the students could pursue. I had four to six boys – some of them would occasionally wonder off – and one girl in my group. We worked from the Project Citizen book, eventually reaching a consensus that a new sports field was what they wanted most. It should be noted, though, that the kind of sports field – soccer, football, or baseball – could not be agreed upon and that only two boys actually wrote down notes in their books. Also, a few girls talked to me afterwards, wanting to know why they had not received a book. I told them that we had simply run out, and that they would have to share. I could tell they were disappointed, but to be honest, I am not sure how we could have been better prepared. I was originally told to expect from thirty to sixty students, which makes the amount of needed materials guess work.

Before we left, we met once again as a large group and had the students consider the three options they had brainstormed: dress code, sports field, and immigration. They voted, and they chose immigration. Brett, Phil, and I were unsure how tackling such a large issue would work within our Project Citizen curriculum, but we did not want to
discourage the students by telling them it was too difficult of an issue for them to address. After all, the whole point of this program is to encourage students to believe they can make a difference within their communities.

Day Two:

We returned to Site-A two Fridays later at 3:30 pm, hoping that meeting at an earlier time would help the students stay better focused. Our hopes were not entirely fulfilled.

We had closer to thirty students this second week, so we opened up the day by giving the survey to those students who had not yet taken it. We then met together as a large group and again reviewed the three policies they could address. As subtly as possible, we tried to steer them away from immigration, as we felt that working on a more local issue, specifically policies related to their school, would increase their chances of actually changing an existing policy. A few of the boys, however, were quite vocal in favor of immigration, gaining the support of the fellow students by raising their voices above the others and declaring, “America is supposed to be a free land!” and “We should just get rid of the borders!”

We had not come unprepared for this situation, so we agreed that they could address the issue of immigration. Before splitting into groups, we once again asked them to consider what a “policy” is. They gave several accurate answers, including “something you have to follow,” “a direction or rule,” and “a guideline.”

Brett had brought three packets that thoroughly covered some of the ways students can become involved with state immigration policy (e.g. collecting signatures, attending protest rallies, etc.). Unfortunately, neither my coworkers nor I had had time to look through this packet – we had only received it when we arrived at Cite-A – and so we could not provide the students with specific details. This did not seem to matter to the students, though. They had their own ideas about how to change immigration policy: kill the Governor, kill the President, and remove all borders. Boys and girls both cheered these suggestions. I was at a loss as to how to react. I told them they could not just murder the governor, to which one boy asked, “What if we ‘accidentally’ walk into him with a knife?”

By that time I was quite concerned for the future of our country, and I asked them, “Do you guys really believe that violence is the answer to everything?” I am sorry to report that I was met with a chorus of eager “Yeahs!” Those students that did not believe violence was the answer were lost in the louder calls of the other students.

Some order was restored to my group when one of the after school program leaders walked by and asked them to calm down. I began purposefully directing my questions to those students who seemed interested in options other than violence and anarchy. I asked them what they thought about petitions or protest marches. They seemed to like these ideas but were discouraged because they knew their signatures would not count because they were not legal adults. I pointed out that they could still collect signatures, but this did not seem like a promising solution to them. All in all, these were the most frustrating moments of this project. By now it was approaching 5:00 pm, and we had not even identified any specific area of immigration that could be addressed. The students were understandably tired, and talking about immigration was obviously stirring up high emotions. We reconvened as a big group only briefly; the students were apparently not willing to work seriously on this project.

Day Three:

I realize I was not especially positive about the events of the second day, so I will begin this entry by immediately stating that this day was considerably more successful than the previous one.
When we met this third time, it was on a Thursday, and we had a much smaller group – about fifteen students. We brought them all together and shared our plan to make a poster board outlining their work on the project. I am pleased to report many of students responded positively to this idea. Having a specific goal seemed to provide them with some extra motivation. We explained that the board would be divided into three sections – identifying the problem, researching the problem, and proposing a solution for the problem – and we divided them into smaller groups to work on one of the topics.

I worked with students proposing a solution to the problem. I first asked them to clarify the problem they wanted to fix regarding immigration. Their main concern seemed to be the splitting up of families, so I asked them what new policies they would like to propose. A few of the boys really put some thought into this question, and they decided that America should offer a “red card,” which would be easier for immigrants to obtain than a green card. They wanted people to be able to live in America without having the go through a huge amount of paper work. This red card would also be given to any nieces or nephews of immigrants who want to live with their aunt or uncles in America.

Although the idea of a red card would probably never work in the real world, I was pleased that a few students had showed genuine interest in the project. The students had also asked me to bring information on how to contact the governor; that way any adult who saw their board and wanted to act on their ideas would be able to write the governor regarding the red card proposal.

Before leaving, we reconvened as a large group. We discussed the layout of the board and possible graphs that could be included. A few rough sketches of the layout for the display board were drawn by students, and we ended the day by encouraging them to write their own letters to the governor, which could then be included as part of the display board.

Day Four:

Though I was not able to attend the fourth week, my co-facilitators informed me the day went relatively well and that the display board was successfully completed.

Conclusion:

Facilitators should be in contact with teachers or after-school coordinators before they arrive on the school site to begin Project Citizen. This should eliminate some of the confusion concerning the responsibilities expected of the college facilitators. The program would work better within a classroom setting, as the students I worked with in the after school program had little or no motivation to participate in the program. A more structured agenda would also help. The students at Site-A did not become productive until we outlined specific objectives.

Finally, the middle school students must be forewarned that this program is not a quick-fix solution to their problems. Some of the students I talked to at Site-A believed from the very beginning that Project Citizen was a waste of time, and to be honest, I feel that the majority of students held this view by the end. They created a poster board, which was then put on display for the community, but they did not see any of their goals realized. True, choosing to work on immigration issues greatly limited their chances of success. Yet what if they had chosen a more feasible policy change? Who would have continued to guide them to see their proposal and plan of action carried out to completion? The role of the college facilitators ends after the creation of the poster board. I am afraid that Project Citizen creates false hopes among students. Of course, they need be told that they have a voice, that their opinions matter; yet, it is equally important that they understand that the realization of any policy change will take time and effort well beyond Project Citizen; a message I am unsure the students at my school received.
Day One:

Our Honors class at CSU, Stanislaus, was first introduced to Project Citizen at the start of our spring semester. We learned that our purpose throughout the semester was to become competent with the Project Citizen program, introduce it via several school site visits to elementary and middle-school children, and work with the children to formulate a policy issue and action plan that would be presented at a gathering of some sort by the semester’s end. The details we learned later, in staggered amounts. We spent the first few weeks reviewing the Project Citizen coursework, formulating a survey for distribution to the school sites, and working schedules out to accommodate the school site visits. After a survey was decided upon, the students who were to visit each site were briefed on what to generally expect.

Upon entering the campus, each group would identify itself to the administration, which would direct the students to the teacher-led in-class or after-school program that had already been working with Project Citizen materials. The students, who would have already been exposed to Project Citizen, would mainly work with their teachers and supervisors on the policy formulation; the CSUS students would act as facilitators, essentially go-betweens for the teachers and their pupils. The teachers would lead the lessons, and we would assist them.

March 24th marked the beginning of my group’s visits to our Middle School Site A, in which an after school program was already in place. Upon entering the campus at 4:00 pm, I found that no one knew of any such program connected to CSUS. I discovered that an after-school program did exist to some extent, however, and hurried to get there to discuss with the teacher his or her lesson plans for the day. No teachers were present, however. I learned from the Modesto City-employed leaders of the after-school program that the students had never been introduced to the Project Citizen program at all. The number of students present was approximately twice as many as we had been told to expect, as well. Our group of three people (two CSUS students and one CSUS faculty member) immediately went from stand-by facilitators to very surprised teachers.

Before we distributed the surveys, we decided that some introduction was necessary to the concepts of community and public policy. I gave an impromptu ten-minute presentation to the students and tried to start some discussion, which was fairly successful. Unfortunately, the students were not entirely enthusiastic about the prospect of work as opposed to soccer, which they had been playing before we arrived. This caused a lack of focus among the students.

The largest obstacle for our group was the issue of discipline. With no administrative presence, the students felt no need to be cooperative; we were hardly in a position to order them to get to work, nor to discipline them for not working. We had to rely on less domineering tactics, which were only partly successful. The constant din of forty students might have been easily handled by a threat of detention from a teacher, but we had no such leverage. While the city employees kept kids from getting too unruly, they were unable to convince them to be particularly studious.

After distributing the surveys, we helped the students with any questions that they might have had. We then split them into three groups to decide on a policy that they would like to see changed. The other two groups decided on their school’s dress codes and a new sports field. Mine were more enthused about a somewhat broader topic, that of illegal immigration. I knew that Project Citizen was meant for topics of a smaller scale, but my little group was actually
enthusiastic about the topic. For the first time that day, they were interested. I decided that a theoretical topic with an enthusiastic response was better than a more manageable topic that garnered little interest from the students and decided to play along. Unfortunately, the students were excited, but not well informed, as they knew little about the issues at hand. I realized that few of them had readily available access to the Internet, and even fewer of them would be interested in using it for research for their topic.

When the three groups decided to vote on a topic, it was after 5:00 pm, and the students were restless and anxious to get back to having fun. The voting process on a topic for them to research dissolved into a free-for-all; though the topic of illegal immigration was the favorite, it was more of a fan favorite than a topic that the students wanted to seriously consider. Our group left at 5:30 pm, understandably uncertain of how to proceed for our next meeting, scheduled for two weeks later. The direction that we had expected from the students’ teachers was now in our hands entirely.

**Day Two:**

On April 7th, our groups decided to visit School Site A at an earlier time, when the students might be more focused on work than on play. Arriving at 3:30 pm, we knew that we were on our own, and therefore were more prepared to take a leading role in the program.

We had decided earlier that more discipline should be enacted. We were essentially bluffing, as we had no authority and could not have kept the students from leaving if they wanted to. We had also decided to try to dissuade the students from choosing illegal immigration, as it was an extremely complicated issue not easily dealt with when the students had no research materials. I explained to the students that they might be able to make more of a difference with a more manageable topic. I even mentioned that the mayor of Modesto had indicated interest in visiting a school site and helping the students (I also pointed out the mayor would not have much impact on illegal immigration). Still, we brought along some material concerning illegal immigration in case the students were still interested in the topic. The students were indeed still boisterously interested in their topic.

We gave surveys to the students who had not been at the previous visit. We then spent the majority of the next hour and a half in small groups, discussing illegal immigration. Although the other groups seemed to have difficulty paying attention, my small group was surprisingly attentive. Once the few disruptive students decided to leave, the remaining six or so students were quite helpful in discussing some aspects of illegal immigration. Clearly, smaller groups were more appropriate and useful for this project. The students and I discussed the pros and cons of either deporting illegal immigrants or allowing them to stay. I gave as elementary explanation as I could about how we enact legislation at the federal level, as they were not aware of how policies might be changed. I realized again that this topic was too vast for the students to grasp in the time we had together, but I was able to explain the basics of government. I gave my group interview worksheets that they could give to adults as part of Project Citizen’s research stage, but I never received any back.

My group realized that, since the students were as a whole not especially enthusiastic about the project, and few of them even had access to information concerning illegal immigration, the CSUS students and faculty needed to provide everything that would be needed for the presentation. Although I was unable to attend a future visit held on a different day, I prepared research for my fellow group members to give to the students at School Site A.

**Day Four:**

After being absent from the third visit, I arrived at School Site A on 28th, after the school’s spring break. Although it took a
while for my group to locate all of the materials that had been scattered around after our last visit, we soon ready to begin work on the poster board that the students would present on May 4th at a dinner for numerous local leaders in education and local government. Needless to say, I was anxious to get the students to work on the poster board as soon as possible.

Fewer students were present for the final visit than any of the previous visits. Apparently, most of the students were either at a farewell party for a retiring teacher, or engaged in a water fight. The fact that our students only numbered about fifteen was fortunate, however; a small group was ideal for working on an arts and crafts-centric project. The final visit was the most rewarding. Once the students saw that they could design their poster board however they wished, they became universally excited. The allure of stencils, scissors, and paste was simply too much to resist. Most gratifying was the fact that most of the students were actually focusing on the content of the board, not just its appearance. The students created a very attractive and logically-flowing poster board with little guidance from the CSUS faculty member, the SCBOE member, or me. For the first time, the students were taking matters into their own hands. Had the situation been different, perhaps they would have done so from the very start.

The difficulties of the Project Citizen program at School Site A were principally due to a lack of communication. CSUS faculty, CSUS students, SCBOE members, school officials, city employees, and the middle school students themselves were never all sure of how to proceed. Had my group been more aware of what to expect from the start, we could have adjusted our approach; we did not even learn until the end that we were not required to address all of the students, and could have dealt with only a small group of interested students all along. Such lack of information meant that the Project Citizen program at School Site A was not as fulfilling for those involved as its potential indicated.

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Survey Summary for School Site A:

Having gathered the survey results for school site A, I am happy to say the students generally displayed a positive attitude in their survey answers. The students clearly want to voice their opinions to their peers, teachers and parents. The students seemed to want to be a part of their community, which most of them identified as their school. They also demonstrated some interest in public policy making, and saw this as a key aspect of effective participation in one’s community.

It is important for young people to want to make a difference in their lives, and to be able to help make decisions that will affect not only themselves, but others who are part of their community, as well. I was interested to see that there are young students who identify most closely with their school, and who are so dedicated to their education and to the well being of their fellow classmates.

While I feel the students as a whole are still a bit naïve to their own involvement in their community, I think Project Citizen helped them to better understand how they can play a big role in their school community and in their own neighborhood, city, and country as well. I am glad I could be part of such an enlightening opportunity for these young students.
**First Facilitator’s Reflections: School Site B**

**Day One:**

I had no idea what to expect. It was clear from the start that neither the facilitators nor the junior high students had a clear idea of the direction this project was going to take. The students had a difficult time focusing. There was a lot of talking and joking around by the junior high students. This first session was very challenging.

The students are accustomed at having free time in this time frame, so they were not pleased to discover that they were to remain at their desks after an entire day at school and after having completed their homework the hour before we arrived. Some students kept looking out the window to where some after-school soccer games were taking place.

We introduced ourselves and informed the students about public policy. We then passed around the survey we wanted them to fill out and return. The students talked a lot, were easily distracted by their classmates, and seemed to be quite indifferent to the survey. Some even decided to just copy their neighbor’s responses to the survey.

We then divided them into groups of three and asked the students to identify a problem they felt needed to be addressed. This did not seem to work because each group came up with a different response and had a difficult time agreeing on a problem, once we again had regrouped the class. Also some students kept looking out the window to where some soccer games were taking place.

We ended the session by asking them to think about a problem that they could all agree upon until the next session, which would take place the following week. After the end of this first session, I felt a sense of some disappointment, feeling that the students where unwilling or unable to focus. I kept thinking about what we can do to help them focus a little better.

**Day Two:**

We returned finding that some students that had attended the first session were not present. We decided to give out the survey again. This time it had better results. The students focused a little better this time and there was less copying from each other. More students raised their hand if they had a question regarding the survey. There was still a lot of talking and joking and some students were not very focused. As we might expect from an after-school program, the students seemed tired and ready to go home.

Getting them to cooperate was challenging. But this time they finally decided as a group to address the fact that they were lacking a sports complex park in their neighborhood. Under our direction, the students did some research on the web regarding sport complex parks in other areas. However, this topic did not quite fit into public policy, so it needed modification.

Time was running out so we decided to initiate more direct input by establishing pre-selected subjects that would be possible to address under public policy.

**Day Three:**

We returned to find that we did not seem to have quite all the same students as from the previous sessions. However, our project continued, now running short on time. The junior high students finally decided on a pre-selected subject that was presented to them. They chose to address the issues of dress codes, gangs, and drugs in school. The project moved forward with better direction.

We divided the students into groups. Some groups did research on the web while another group focused on the people who implemented these laws. The students succeeded in preparing a poster with information regarding school laws. Things
seemed to be moving along better, especially in comparison to the previous sessions. One incentive we used was a bite-size chocolate bar for each student during and after the session. This seemed to capture their attention. They were able to focus on the project much better. They still did show some frustration but there was definitely better cooperation in completing the project.

**Day Four:**

At the last session, the students were more cooperative. They had worked on the poster between sessions and the poster was almost completed. When we arrived some students where still busy doing some research in the web. I believe that once they saw that their poster was taking form, they developed a sense of pride. The poster, it seemed, was a good energizer because it created some kind of school pride. Also, knowing that their poster would be presented along with other posters from other schools created an incentive for the students. They enjoyed the feeling of being somewhat competitive in the creation of their school poster and reflected some sign of seriousness to the project for the first time. I should mention that this time, the students as well as us, the facilitators, had a much clearer idea of the direction that this project was finally going to take. In fact, when we walked into the classroom this last time, the students who had been outside having an afternoon snack came back indoors, and quietly went straight to their desks. They were quite focused and waiting to hear what we had to say. I was pretty surprised because they were listening quite attentively to our instructions for filling out the survey a second time. We did pass out some chocolate pieces so they could eat while filling out the survey. I’m sure the chocolate helped. It seemed to me this time around that as they completed the survey they were a lot more serious about it. One student in particular surprised me who in a previous session had happened to be wearing a t-shirt with a picture of Ludwig van Beethoven without being aware of who this was. I had given him some information about Beethoven. Upon hearing the information, the student had just laughed and appeared largely indifferent. Anyway, it surprised me that at this last session he happened to be wearing his Beethoven t-shirt. I thought it was pretty significant that I was able to communicate with him in an unexpected way. This I took as a sign that maybe, just maybe, we have made an impact on the junior high students despite our doubts regarding the amount of learning that would occur in the end. So in the end, I feel some learning regarding public policy was possibly accomplished in an odd but significant sort of way.

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**Second Facilitator’s Reflections: School Site B**

**Day One:**

The first day did not go well, in my view. Initially there were several high school kids (ironically, there in order to fulfill a “community service” requirement) who were very disruptive, constantly drawing attention away from the project. Situated in one corner of the classroom, their behavior became more and more disruptive until the authority figure on-site moved in to quell the brewing mutiny. As the authority figure was drawn to this specific group, disruptions would periodically emerge elsewhere in the classroom (which comprised about 15 students). Conversations on the other side of the room would get louder, some students would get out of their chairs, and some would attempt to leave the class or ask to leave. Thus, the authority figure seemed to be constantly shifting attention from one area of the classroom to another, after which former “free radicals” would once again emerge.
This was all going on as we introduced ourselves, introduced the project, and administered the first survey. The survey did not go terribly, but it did not go terribly well, either. Questions arose with regard to what certain questions meant. One did not understand what “identifying with one’s community” meant. Also, the authority figure had not gone over the project prior to our arrival on the scene, so questions relating directly to the project (those referring to an “action plan,” for example) were not understood. Due to the classroom’s lack of preparation, our shaky and sometimes hesitant/wary introduction (we did not actually talk about “public policy” until the second day, for example, as we were not sure what to expect and basically just dove into the work without knowing exactly how to proceed), and due to, according to another on our team, one student copying an answer from another student’s survey, we ended up administering the pre-survey a second time on the next visit, that time going over each question individually, reading them aloud and asking students if they knew what was meant.

After the survey, we divide into three groups, about five students each. Attempting to get the students discussing issues in my group was difficult. Asking them what “problems” they saw and wanted to address produced little commentary at first. They each stared away from the booklets, away from us. Two in particular chatted amongst themselves periodically about topics unrelated to the project and also conversed with students in other groups or across the classroom. The others in my group were simply quiet. Difficulties in redirecting their attention were exacerbated by the fact that we were at a loss in term of knowing just how to proceed.

I will note here that the aim of Project Citizen has been lost on me from the beginning. Getting “involved with one’s community” seems vague to me in the extreme. For one thing, people can’t help but be “involved” with their own surroundings at least in some way. Do we want these kids to vote? Do we want these kids to “pay more attention to their surroundings”? Do we want these kids to look for things they do not like? For those that identify their school as their most immediate community, who is to say that simply attending class and doing their homework does not constitute “getting involved”? I feel as though the project sought to encourage a will to get involved in whatever way that could be meaningful to the student, but that in itself seems to me to preclude our presence and deliberate involvement. Students simply will perceive and evaluate their surroundings—they can’t really avoid this. Though communities may change, one cannot get away from one’s surroundings or one’s identities (which, I believe, is what we’re really getting at here—“students,” “Californians,” “Americans,” “Earthlings,” and family monikers)—one cannot get away from one’s self, so to speak.

To elucidate how this obstacle actually played out, I return to the group activity: after touching on “dress code,” my group started getting interested in outlining the specific codes, what they thought was unfair, and so on (and incidentally, some of the rules did seem rather extreme though I understand that many were instituted due to gang activity in the area). We had something, it seemed. After reorganizing as a class again, we went through the topics gleaned from each group and sought a consensus on which was most worthy of our collective attention. The topics included getting a skate park into the area, changing the dress code, and improving neighborhood security and safety. As students began going back and forth on this or that facet of this or that possibility, I felt as though the discussion was of the same cloth by which I and others I know complain to one another about taxes or insurance or work or whatever, all the while never intending to do anything about it, never knowing what to do about it. The group I worked with had no
interest in “going through the motions” of filling out the forms involved or acknowledging the work involved in generating social change, and at the same time, those of us administering the material know the project has very little to no chance of actually accomplishing anything policy-wise for the students. This could be due to the fact that 1) the project was only a semester long, and 2) the project itself explicitly revolved around who one would talk to if they really wanted to generate change. How many students saw this, or saw it in these terms? Perhaps a few; perhaps none. Ultimately the poster, not the poster’s content, was the end product. Did this make “going through the motions” the ultimate aim? If so, is this not, ultimately, all this project can “inspire” these kids to do?

It is in this way that I was skeptical with regard to the project’s projected purpose(s). An aim as general as what I perceived to be the aim of Project Citizen is simply not a viable aim. This was something apparent to me from start to finish: the project needed better focus.

Day Two:

While the first day was productive to an extent, the second day lent genuine cause for pessimism. Due to the disorganization of the previous visit, one of our group decided to “lay down some ground rules.” I felt this was a bad idea for no other reason than that these kids were there involuntarily to begin with (after-school program) and had presumably been going through classes all day in which they were being told what to do and how to do it only to be sat down, at a time during which they would otherwise be playing kickball, and asked to “give of themselves” just a little more (even though, again, in what way remained largely unspecified). I did not object, however, as the rudiments of the action seemed to have already been decided upon.

On the whiteboard were some rules that had already been written down by the authority figure. I use the term “authority figure” because we held no power, and the kids knew this: ultimately we could only ask repeatedly for cooperation if it was initially refused. As we were deliberating over the specifics of our “ground rules,” I noticed a student in a hooded sweatshirt (hood engaged) walk up to the list already on the whiteboard, utter “rules?” to himself, and scoff, wiping a rule away with his sleeve. We then pasted paper up to write on so no one could wipe ours away. They included standards like “be respectful,” “no cursing,” “raise your hand,” etc. Generally speaking, I feel they had little, if any, positive effect.

Among “breeches” I noticed were some antics of a high school student that remained perched on top of his desk rather than seated with the rest of the class. Aside from a few harmless “wise-cracks,” he told one student he would beat him up after school the following day if he came after the kid (a seventh- or eighth-grader) had retorted to one the wise-cracks. Now I realize the high school student (senior I believe, but I am not certain) was joking (I hope), but at the same time, the kid was obviously discouraged.

Another crack included “beating up the governor” as a suggested “policy” to be pursued. Later, he brought up the fact that they were not allowed to bring guns to school as something that needed to be addressed (again, jokingly, of course, but it nevertheless distracted). At one point someone called someone else a “bitch,” and I heard “shut up” once or twice.

After laying out the ground rules, we backtracked from the first day to reconsider the nature of public policy. The kids who commented when prompted associated policy with “rules.” I affirmed this and added that public policy also went beyond rules for individual conduct and included governmental rules for how communities should operate and should be designed generally (how many cops on patrol, how many street lights in a given area, and
crosswalk design, for example). After trying to get re-acquainted with the class and again introduce what we were there for, one student asked why he should care about school policy when he was going to be out of the school soon enough. Another student concurred. We then administered the pre-survey again.

We then went over possible topics for pursuit. A general agreement on a need for a “sports complex” developed, but this was left to interpretation. (I should note that some students attended who had not been there for the first session and some who had come to the first session were no longer attending). We then divided into groups to research the Internet. My group dispersed immediately: two who seemed as though they would participate left immediately, and another, who only spoke Spanish (which I do not) left shortly thereafter. Another stood nearby and watched the computer but stayed apart from the group (which was now down to one student and myself). I asked him if he had his book, and he said “No.” I asked if it was at his desk or in his pack and he said, “No.” He then stared at me, challenging me to exert authority he knew I did not have (and I should also note that I have a horrible poker face, so that likely did not help).

So I was left with one student that really did want a soccer field but really didn’t want to fill out the form or do any research. He described the fields in the area as “dirty,” and he said that he had to go to Manteca for tournaments. We found information on the number of fields in the area, but we could not find anything regarding park maintenance policy or anything of that nature.

**Day Three:**

Day three went beautifully. This was likely due in part to the removal of the high-school students, and in part to the candy a new member of our team brought in. The biggest reason, though, was probably that the new facilitator clearly had more experience in dealing with children than the rest of us did—and the students perceived this as well, I think. This facilitator took “wise-cracks” (which were nothing compared to the second day’s commentary) in stride and maintained a comfortable and confident demeanor, which I think was received as a fresh change from the prior day’s “ground rules.”

The group was sub-divided into working groups: three on the computers looking for information on dress code(s), a “sports field,” and “security;” and one working with the “Project Citizen” booklet. My initial cynicism was checked by each groups’ willingness to conduct research despite certain setbacks, like irrelevant search results. The “dress code” group was unable to find their specific school’s code, and the “security” issue was far too vague to yield anything of utility; but after several minutes, one student did finally yield some information on park policies and tentative reforms in Stanislaus County. I was impressed.

After research had been completed, a few students expressed interest in designing and presenting the poster board. I don’t know what else to cite specifically about day three other than that there was nothing that seemed to deviate to any significant degree from the project. Overall, it went quite smoothly. We left the poster there for the students to work on. I’ll only note here that I was unable to attend on the fourth day, though I hear it went well.

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**Third Facilitator’s Reflections: School Site B:**

**First Day:**
A facilitator is defined as someone who makes progress easier (www.dictionary.com). Prior to enrolling in the Honors Service Learning Practicum, I had yet to experience what it meant to be a facilitator. Early in process the ideas and abstracts of the project were vague to me. I did not know what was going to be expected of me in terms of helping out in the project, nor how much time was going to be spent in or out of the classroom. I was eager to sign up as a facilitator because I was more interesting working along with the kids in Project Citizen. The first day, we went to School Site B’s ESAS after-school program, I like the others in the group were expecting that either a teacher or the person in-charge would be in the process of talking to the students about Project Citizen or that the students were aware that we were going to be there to guide them through the process of proposing a public policy about an issue in their community.

It was unlike anything we had imagined; the coordinators of the program thought we were going to anchor the process and had yet to inform the students that they would be taking part of in the Project Citizen project. As we handed out the pre-survey, a few of the students were interested in learning what this project would be about. One student caught my attention because the manner in which some of the students behaved followed his example. In other words, he was a leader not only in the program but also in the school, the student-body’s vice president. He was selected to be in my group of five students. At times he would engage in the group discussion as if he was willing to take charge of the group and lead them into a discussion relating to the project itself; in fact when the students came back from their groups discussions one issue that he brought up during our discussion was voted to be the class project that was safety issues in the vicinity of the school. At other times, he would just wander around the room and would say things that were typical for his age. As disruptive as this was he did finally settle down. He and his fellow classmates gradually narrowed things down and decided on a problem to attack.

I studied the handouts describing the role and behavior a facilitator should portray during the project and I followed these guidelines as much as possible on the first visit to the school site. A good number of these students were rowdy, outspoken and would wander around the room as if no one was there to tell them whether what they were doing was on track or not. Half the time, the coordinators had to tell the students to sit down, be quiet or do something that was disruptive. The high school volunteers weren’t much help either: they were catalysts for some of the disruption, and instead of taking the initiative to calm kids down they became part of the problem. The program coordinators finally decided to remove the volunteers when the situation started to get out of hand.

I was expecting the first day to go better than it did. I had expected we would go to Site B and the kids would already have a sense of what they were expected to do in the project, similar to the situation encountered by the group at Site C (the elementary school classroom). Though the first day was a challenge, it did not bring me down. I was still looking forward to the next week. I figured maybe the coordinators would have a better grasp and motivate the students to see the value in taking part in Project Citizens because they can make a difference, knowing they will be the leaders of tomorrow.

Day Two:
As a group, we decided to take a different approach in order to get the students better involved in the project. The first comment I made in class was “the kids were rather rowdy and disrespectful particularly, when we were leading the individual group discussions to propose possible issues for Project Citizen project to the class. As facilitators we were
able to help the students establish ground rules and remind them to follow their rules, but we did not have the authority to tell students how they should behave. Our classmates offered some advice for how we might increase student participation in the project. They thought we should try to engage the students more in the conversation and direct our attention more to the students who wanted to participate in Project Citizen. The advice we received motivated us to be better prepared the next time we went to Site B.

As soon as the students saw us arriving to the school, some of them wanted to sign out as if they were going home because they did not want to participate in the project. Perhaps they felt awkward knowing they had to participate in something (Project Citizen) they had no prior knowledge of. From the few students that remained, two of them participated during our first visit. Following the advice that our classmates recommended, we decided to re-survey the students because we felt that with the first surveys, the students were not thoroughly informed about the goals and purpose of Project Citizen. By having them re-take the survey, our aim was that the students would better understand the project that would enable them to decide what issue they wanted work on for the Project Citizen project.

According to our research team’s statistical data, the general trend of answers to the pre- and post-survey was relatively the same. We concluded that the lack of continuity in students present for the pre and post surveys might have influenced the results.

For this session we asserted more of a leadership role to further the discussion about the safety issue they had selected to work on in the first session; but the students did not want to talk about the safety issue. Instead they came up with three alternative issues they wanted to discuss for the project. They finally settled on the issue of building a larger sports field for their school. The reason they elected to work on a policy to build sports field was because they felt the existing fields were not big enough for them to play on. A larger sports field would benefit them more because it would allow them to interact with more students in sports activities. The reasons for wanting to build a sports field were compelling, and they were on the right track. However, because the Project Citizen program is so short, we could not engage in such a project, which would have required a large amount of time and energy we did not have at our disposal.

The progress we made on the second visit was gradual. For example, it took the students most of the time to decide what issue they wanted to focus on. For the remainder of the time, we began researching different policies that dealt with building a sports complex and other relevant information. The only information we found was how a school successfully fundraised enough money to build a sports complex. Although we found very little information, a few of the interested students worked diligently to accomplish the task that we asked them to do. For the third visit, I was hoping we could make more progress on the project than we had in our previous two visits.

The Third Visit Made a Difference:
Before making the third visit, we informed our classmates that we had tried to implement the advice suggested to us the previous week, but the outcome had been similar, and for several reasons. Student participation during our first two visits had been minimal; the high school volunteers had caused their share of distraction and were eventually asked to leave during time we were there. Our group had other minor obstacles to overcome, as well, but a few of the students worked arduously to accomplish each of the components that were required in the Project Citizen booklet. We discussed our concerns and looked to our classmates for any further assistance or advice they could share with us.
in order for us to consider other possible approaches to get the students better involved in the project. Brett Forray, our Service Learning advisor, went with us to the school site to guide and mentor our group about the proper techniques of facilitating, as well as to help inform the students about the process and objectives of Project Citizen.

During our class sessions, facilitators talked about what had happened at their individual school sites. Our classmates gave us a few suggestions, and Brett informed our group that Danielle Jones would be making the next trip to the school site with us. She had already worked with the students at Site B during their Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in early January.

As we arrived, Danielle was already at the school site and was eager to get the students more involved in the project. When she began speaking, the students paid close attention to Danielle’s every word. The only problem that we had to resolve was that the students had yet to decide on an issue that they would like to see change in their community. Unfortunately, we had one more session left and it was highly unlikely that the students could even make the poster presentation that went along with the Project Citizen guidelines.

Danielle suggested to the students that instead of worrying about selecting one particular issue to deal with, they could select a few of the topics mentioned from the previous two lessons we had. As an incentive for all the students that participated, she handed out a piece of candy to each student. It was such an amazing turn around from the previous sessions as we began (earlier than expected) to research various topics, which included: policy on the school dress code, gang affiliation around the vicinity of school and building a larger sports field. The students researched a plethora of policies in the above-mentioned issues. Before leaving the classroom, Danielle, Brett and our group talked to a few students about what the information was needed in each section of the poster.

I was unable to make it to the last session we had at our school site, but the group informed me that these kids worked diligently to finish the poster for the May 4th presentation at the Modesto Centre Plaza. I was in attendance during the May 4th presentation and once I saw the poster from the school site we attended I felt proud and honored for each and every one of the students who participated in the project.
Survey Summary for School Site B:

As one of the writers of the survey, I was unsure at first as to how the students would answer the questions. I figured the first time the surveys were given their responses would be negative towards the process and cynical or critical toward the idea that their opinion matters in their communities.

However, after going over the data, I found that a large majority of the students had a positive feeling about their communities. Many also stated that they enjoyed helping others, and that they would like to help out in their communities, but didn’t always know how.

When it came to the multiple choice questions (11-15), I was fairly certain that most students would get them wrong the first time they took the survey. Most actually did pretty well with the question identifying public policy; however, the questions concerning the steps of the Project Citizen program seemed difficult for the students, and very few answered them correctly.

The second time the survey was given, I expected the answers to be more positive than the first time. For the most part, this was the case. In only a few cases did the students answer more negatively than they had before. For example, after taking the survey for the second time, a significantly lower number of students felt that their opinion mattered in their community.

Concerning the multiple choice questions (11-15), I had figured that after going through the program and taking the survey again, the students would get more of the answers correct. However, their answers were about the same as they had been on the first set of surveys. It didn’t appear to me that they had been able to understand the steps involved in the Project Citizen process.

Overall, I didn’t see much change in their responses to the pre- and post surveys. Both times the students expressed a positive feeling about their communities and about their ability to make a difference in them. They also consistently understood what public policy was, but couldn’t correctly answer questions either time about the process they were going through. I can conclude from this that the program didn’t have as big an impact as some had hoped it would.
First Facilitator’s Reflections: School Site C

Day 1:
For Project Citizen I had the privilege of visiting a sixth grade class in Modesto, known as site C. During my work with this class I was continually impressed with the progress the children were making and the enthusiasm that they were approaching the project with. During the time that I helped them complete the project I noticed that in the controlled environment there seemed to be a lot of progress because the class behaved so well. The reason that this happened, I believe, is because the teacher was in control of the class the entire time; however, I heard that this was not true at the other sites, which were after-school programs in Modesto.

When I would meet with the other facilitators, other Stanislaus students who attended the two afternoon programs, they did not seem to have the same type of success with the students that I was having. For instance, by the time I left the students at site C the first day we had already chosen two topics for the project. When I met with the other facilitators, though, I discovered that the two after-school programs had not come nearly as far in the project as site C had. This lead me to believe that the project would most likely succeed more easily in a controlled environment, such as a classroom, instead of in a program where there is a lack of control, such as an after-school program.

A possible alternative to the after-school program would be to attempt to apply Project Citizen to more classroom situations, instead of to the after-school program. I only say this because the sixth grade class seemed to be extremely enthusiastic to attempt the project. They set up interviews, left on Friday with an assignment and would come back on Monday with the research finished. Overall, the kids in the sixth grade class sounded like they were more apt to become involved in the project.

Day 2:
One problem that the teacher and I noticed with Project Citizen was that there was not enough time to effectively teach these kids about how to change public policy. I believe we made them excited to learn about how to change policy, and briefly showed them what they could do to fix a problem they noticed in their community. In the end, though, it seemed as if the project was just enough to get them started. If the project were to be conducted over a longer period of time, possibly a whole year, I believe it would have more success.

The reason why I did not feel the project was entirely successful is because the kids were able to see how to make changes, and they began to become excited to try to make these changes, but realistically they were not making any changes. In my opinion, and the opinion of the sixth grade teacher, this is discouraging for the kids in the long run. I think it is discouraging because the class put a lot of effort into trying to make changes to the food that is being served to their school and the bell system their school implements. When there is only a five week time period to conduct research, and come up with a plan to change these problems, though, the class feels like they did not accomplish anything. This is because they had two problems they wanted to fix, but in the end all they were able to do was make a presentation, and not see any results to their hard work.

In short, I think it would be beneficial for Project Citizen to be attempted over a longer period of time. If this were to happen it would be more likely that the class would be able to see that their hard work is actually making a change. In my opinion this method would be more inspiring for the kids because it lets them know that they can actually make a change in their community.
Day 3:

On my last visit to site C the students were putting the finishing touches on their poster board displays. Since there were not many questions I had the opportunity to talk with the teacher for a little while and discovered that some students were a little discouraged with the project because they did not feel like they were being taken seriously.

When the students interviewed a school official to find out how they could change the bell system, the school official basically told them to not worry about it. As I was discussing this with the teacher she told me the same school official had asked her why she was doing this project with the class, it “won’t change a thing around here, and time could be spent better doing other activities.” These were the words of the school official.

This type of opinion seems to indicate another problem with Project Citizen. Some of the key people these kids are interviewing were not taking their interest seriously at all. While some of the officials interviewed by the students were genuinely helpful, other officials were just answering questions to humor the class. The latter experiences were discouraging for the students, who were taking this project seriously and doing their best to change a school policy.

Since I discovered this type of situation occurred with students at site C, as well, I would suggest that one of two things happen. Either prepares the students for the possibility of people resisting their efforts to enact a change, so they are not led to think “if my class can’t change a public policy, what is the point of even trying to do it by myself?” Or possibly instruct the facilitators or teachers leading the project to speak with the officials who will be interviewed before the students come into contact with them. With this strategy, the teacher or facilitator might be able to gauge whether or not this person will be helpful, and thus be in a position to suggest to the students whether they should contact the official, or not.
Survey Summary for School Site C

My primary task in this project was to help develop a survey that would give those who review this report a better idea of Project Citizen, highlighting the significance, impact, and change that Project Citizen had on the students who participated. Being twenty years old and realizing that this survey was going to kids of elementary school age, I thought back to when I was that age and wondered how I would have answered the questions.

The survey was broken into two parts; a pre-survey, before the students underwent project citizen and a post-survey, for the students to reflect on their feelings after completing the project. Each survey consisted of ten multiple choices questions based on how they felt and another five questions judging their knowledge of Project Citizen. Surveys were delivered to each school and many interesting results arose.

I must admit it was a pleasant surprise to see that, overall, most kids answered both pre- and post-surveys with positive attitudes toward the first ten prompts posed in our survey. In particular, students at Site C showed promising awareness with respect to statement six, which stated, “There are problems in this community that affect me.” 93% of the students stated that this is often or sometimes true. What this tells me is that students are aware of problems or potential problems around them and maybe if they had a venue in which to approach resolving these problems, they work toward a constructive course of action.

I was rather disappointed however when it came to the final five questions. I had made the assumption that the Project Citizen booklets that the CSU Stanislaus students had received and studied were also read over by the students at the Elementary and Middle School’s, though perhaps not with the same intensity and critical analysis as we might have put into it. One particular set of data from Site C was most disturbing. Question fourteen asked, “Which is the most important thing to do when developing an action plan?” In the pre-survey, 48% answered correctly; but in the post-survey only 35% answered correctly. This tells me the students may not have studied the Project Citizen booklet carefully, nor taken the project seriously when we met with them to discuss it.

Looking back on Project Citizen, I like the idea it promotes; to get students involved (at a young age) in discussing public policy issues. By getting youths involved, we encourage them to become better citizens and help them learn the value of working to create a better community. However, I am unsure if Project Citizen is the best path to achieving this goal. Question four asked whether a student’s opinion mattered in their community and at each site the percentage dropped from pre- to post-survey. This is an uncomfortable fact to reconcile, for involvement our community rarely comes if we do not think our opinion matters.
Reflections on “Showcase Day”

I must admit, going to the showcase presentation event I was not quite sure what to expect. Facilitators had voiced concerns about time constraints and focus issues during our weekly class meetings, and I could not help but wonder just how chaotic these billboards and students would prove to be. Would posters be finished? Would students be well informed and able to share their research with others? Would students even show up? Reports back had been improving over the weeks, but I still had my doubts.

However, when I arrived at the site (Modesto’s Centre Plaza), I was pleasantly surprised. By 4:30 the students had already set up their poster boards and were standing about, likely wondering what they were supposed to do with themselves until the adults came wandering through and asking questions.

The basic schedule of the event was as follows: set-up, dinner, presenting (i.e. talking to adult passersby about their work), break, and then more presenting. I believe that they had intended to present before- and then, again, after- dinner, but altered this in order to work around the schedule of the speaker. During the break the people in charge of the event presented the students with certificates of appreciation for their works, and a few of the adults said some encouraging words. Afterwards the student went back inside the lobby (where their boards were) and continued presenting them.

Site A, one of the junior high after-school program groups, presented the first board along the procession of posters. They had chosen to focus their presentation on the recent immigration policy issues. Regardless of the reality that they would probably not be able to directly address the policies related to this issue, the students felt the issue crucial enough to persevere.

Their poster was the most organized and had a professional aura to it. It was complete with statistics of a novice but informative nature, noting the number of immigrants in past years and similar nature, as well as opinions on the matter. The rightmost section of the board display pictures of our current president (of the United States) and California’s governor, as “people who influence policy.” And, though a particular or direct action plan did not seem present on the board, Site A’s students did propose that concerned citizens should write to governing entities to voice their standpoints.

Unfortunately, due the confusing geography of downtown Modesto, only one student from Site A was able to make it to the event. Luckily their after school program leader was there as well, but it still made her, (the student), rather pitiable, (in the not-at-all-negatively connotative sense; assuming that one can still reclaim that word). She did know the information well though, and was willing to speak up, soft-spoken as she was, in order to share with the adults viewing the boards.

The first noticeable aspect of Site B’s presentation was that they had bothered to dress alike, in school t-shirts displaying their school colors with pride. Only two students from the site were at the event, a 7th grade boy and 8th grade girl. According to what they told us, they basically put the whole poster board, (and its information), together themselves. Still, it was pleasant to see even two students passionate about their issue; especially considering their learning environment.

Basically, they go to school in a situation that is largely effected by gang activity. The girl told us that their own quad is split into areas designation for certain gang members,
and those areas have to be closely watched by campus supervisors because of this. Students are not allowed to wear stripes, red or blue shirts, canvas belts, or carry mirrors. Also, there is a list of students who have been caught for causing gang-related problems. Punishments for the above listed prohibitions, as well as many others, are doubled for students on this list. All this is necessary just to keep kids safe, and this is on a junior high campus. Such facts are incredibly unnerving, particularly to those of us who went to school in the more sheltered areas.

Their topic, however, did not strike me as quite as thought out as it could have been. In the center of their board the students had listed present school dress code regulations, and then their proposed new regulations next to those. It seemed to be that they simply wanted not to have to worry about the colors they wore and similar things, but they neglected to investigate how such changes could be made in light of the obvious dangers. At least, they did not explain to us how such changes could be made safely, especially considering how they could list evidence of the presence of gang issues on their campus. Oddly enough, they seemed so used to the situation that they didn’t appear to see much of a problem with simply making the changes.

Something else that struck me was what the girl had to face in order to be at the presentation event. She told us that she had to miss softball practice because it was at the same time, but the disheartening aspect of it was the reactions of people in her life. They, apparently, thought the project to be a waste of her time, and could not understand why she would choose that over practice. Luckily she chose to make her own judgment on the subject, and found herself to believe that getting involved in her community was more important than just one practice.

Site C was the class of advanced elementary school students, and made for a striking contrast next to the other two programs. At least, from what was discussed in our class meetings, they appeared to have stronger leadership, (their teacher), and more organized environment- a classroom rather than after school program.

There were about four or so students at each of the two posters for this site. Apparently they had not been able to choose between issues related to cafeteria food and their emergency bell systems, so they split into two groups and compiled posters for both. The posters were rather disorderly, but on in the sense that rules of symmetry and spacing were not abided too (much). They did, however, include all the information that the Project Citizen workbook had instructed to.

In regard to cafeteria food, their complaint was that most of the meals were made of at least 30% fat. That, and the food is just plain disgusting, (just think of the plastic-like layer that had to be periodically peeled off the cafeteria cheese sauce and you will understand what they mean). They proposed a new policy be enforced that would set a fat content limit at 20%, (preferably less), per food item.

The issue of bells was quite simply a safety issue. Apparently the signal for students to get indoors, should there be a shooter on campus, is for the regular bell to be rung five times. Also, I believe that only the principal has the ability to issue such an alarm. The students’ logic was that the period of time it would take for their bell to ring five times would be far too long in an emergency situation. Their idea was that there should be different kinds of bells for different emergencies, so that by following a code any authority figure should be able to sound the right alarm through the campus phones.

Site C’s students, unfortunately, ran in to some problems with adults taking their work seriously. They took it as the adults not thinking that they were capable of accomplishing real change, and this greatly discouraged them. Apparently they had already attempted writing to their principal
about another school-related issue, and little attention had been paid to them. I find this incredibly frustrating, especially since these kids were really making an effort; at least it did not stop them completely.

(On a side note; a “little birdy” informed me that the students had been using the fact that the cafeteria food had made some students sick as their reason for a change. Worry over lawsuits on the part of the authority figures may have been what brought on their reluctance to seriously cooperate. Still, it would have been nice if this could have been explained to the students.)

The Site C students did have some reflections of their own about the program that they were willing to share with us. The overall statement was that they wished they had more time to prepare/research for the projects (which may have been why the boards appeared somewhat “thrown together”). That, and the fact that they did not feel like they were being taken seriously were the main problems they noticed enough to point out.

Personally, I cannot help but admire these kids for their willingness to participate in this project. Back when I was in junior high I highly doubt I would have been exactly ecstatic about giving up my recreational time to make a poster board. I think it is a great idea to get these kids involved in positive activities from a very early age, and to give them plenty of encouragement because -- believe me -- they need it.

I would suggest, however, that the project be given much more time so that the students won’t feel rushed. This way, also, they would be more confident about the ideas they develop. It seems that the classroom environment is the ideal place to get kids involved, but I think that after school programs could use the structure as well. Far too often these kids are there simply because their parents are off at work and they have nowhere else to go. It would be wonderful if we could provide them with an enjoyable/interesting, as well as safe, place to spend their time; give them some place to want to be.

And, of course, if they can develop into community-involved students (and eventually adults), then that would be all the better. I just know that they appeared to really appreciate our interest in what they had to say. Everyone- especially kids who are developing their outlook on life and this world- need to feel like their opinions and ideas matter. This project seems like it might just be a step in the right direction.
Gaining knowledge is a process acquired through different avenues and under a variety of circumstances. Most individuals connect the thought of education with a school setting in which formal instruction is presented to students by scholars. However, there are times when unique situations present themselves that require unconventional learning methods if we are to understand the significance of the situation’s purpose and to evaluate practical applications of theory and knowledge. For this reason, exploring diverse modes in order to acquire education is essential to becoming a well-rounded student and valuable asset to society.

With these thoughts in mind, I felt it beneficial to participate in Showcase Day, an event in which the junior high students we had been working with (to promote the concepts of public policy by addressing a problem in the community to demonstrate the possibility of making a positive difference) would be allowed to share the fruits of their labor with important figures in their community. Prior to attending the event, I was somewhat confused and skeptical regarding the purpose of this exhibition. I was uncertain as to what the actual procedure would be and how my role in the process would benefit the younger students as well as the project the Honors students had concentrated on for the past two months. Upon arrival to the center three hours before the commencement of the presentations, the meeting place was completely vacant, which provided me with more time to contemplate the result of this showcase. One of the chief concerns that dominated my track of thought regarded whether the students had had enough time to prepare to share their research and conclusions with others. It is a well-known fact among the participants of this project that the process of educating these young minds on the value of community involvement has not been a simple task; we have all endured many obstacles to achieve a goal that at times appeared unattainable. Since this project had proved difficult for University students, I wondered if junior high students would be able to tackle such an event.

Once the students arrived, however, many of my doubts dissipated. The young representatives from all three schools arrived approximately at the same time. It was quite surprising to me to notice how enthused they appeared to present their findings to a group of complete strangers. The principal reason for my surprise was that at their age, if I had been asked to present the research I had acquired regarding a condition at my school that I found unsatisfactory to a group of adults whom I had never met, I would have been overcome with nerves and anxiety. It was inspiring to be in the presence of growing minds striving to express their opinions in the hopes of being heard, and hoping ultimately to make a change for the better in their community. Despite the words that had been expressed by these students prior to this meeting concerning their belief that this project would make little difference in their personal lives as well as their life in accordance with their community, they seemed to have arrived at the center with a sense of optimism, wishing that perhaps the results of this exhibition would prove their preconceived ideas incorrect.

Each school arrived with a poster board of a single topic they had elected to concentrate on, except for one school that was unable to select one and so created two posters with two distinct issues to present. Site A decided to address the growing problem of illegal immigration because it was a concern that
closely affected most of the student body from that particular school. The students had agreed, based on their personal experiences, that the new laws being contemplated regarding the admittance into this country negatively affected them, their families, and their community as a whole because many of them had migrated from another country in search of opportunity and a better life in the United States. Evidently, this issue was one they had grown very passionate about and would prove controversial to many considering the current state of the country. Although three students had been selected to represent this school, only one girl was able to attend, and as a result, was left with no other alternative but to explain and expand on the ideas presented on the poster to all the attendees who demonstrated interest in that topic. Although very soft-spoken and somewhat timid, this young girl did an excellent job in presenting the issue at hand. Each time someone approached her with questions regarding the opinions conveyed on the poster, she took the time to explain with diligence not only why the topic was selected, but also the steps that had been taken in order to begin the process of altering a policy. Using statistics and vivid imagery, she clearly demonstrated the negative effects refusing the admittance of immigrants into the U.S. would have not only on the immigrant themselves, but on the citizens living here presently. The fact that all the students involved in this project from Site A understood the concept of public policy and the steps to take in order to change a policy were evident by the alternative plans they had devised in order for the issue to be settled fairly.

The students from Site B, on the other hand, had settled on a completely different subject. They chose to tackle the matter of the dress code enforced in their school because based on the area in which the school was located and the amount of gang activity found throughout the community, the students were obligated to follow a code of attire they deemed unreasonable. There were two students in attendance speak for the entire school, one-seventh grade boy and one-eighth grade girl. Ironically, the young girl, who would leave for high school the following year and would not be able to enjoy the fruits of her labor if a change were to take place in the school, seemed very zealous in communicating the concerns of the entire student body. When she first told me what grade she was, I was taken aback by her enthusiasm because I would assume that her interest in the issue affecting her school would dispel since by this time next year she will be in a completely different environment, dealing with an entire new set of problems. I found it very rewarding to see such a young person show such a degree of interest that would affect others more than her. Although these students are living in an environment in which violence and insecurity reigns, these students still find it in their hearts to care for one another and concentrate on a topic that promotes community participation. Each time an adult asked a question about their poster, both students were eager to communicate the current state of their school regarding their dress code, recognizing the unfair circumstances they are forced to deal with in comparison to other schools. It was obvious that these students joined in order to form one voice that would express to others their discontent and the need for a change to take place immediately.

Site C was the school that decided to take on double the workload in order to put across the message they had been waiting to disclose to others in anticipation that they would have some effect on the state of their school environment. The issues of the improvement of cafeteria food and the use of the bell system were the two problems that were confronted after much deliberation. As a spectator, I was eager to learn about the food in particular that they were served since the diets and poor health of our youth are becoming an ever-growing problem in this
country. I was appalled to see the pictures the students had taken of the meals they were served. Firstly, many of the food options I was not even able to recognize as edible since I could not recognize what they were. I was stunned to recognize the type of meals these children were served, especially in a school that was viewed as being prosperous in comparison to other schools in close proximity. After learning as much as I could about the meals served at this school, I came to the conclusion that this was a problem that needed to be addressed immediately because the importance of proper diet and health is far more significant in children because they need to maintain a healthy way of life in order to grow into healthy adults. The school officials at Site C have demonstrated complete negligence with regard to the consequences their actions can have on these students.

The value of this experience was clearly recognized by several of those present after the event had concluded. The passion with which these students approached the opportunity to communicate their research and deductions with others demonstrated that the effort the facilitators from CSU Stanislaus had invested into these students and their concerns was worthwhile. There was doubt since the commencement of this project as to the effectiveness of this assignment, but I believe that if all the Honors students had attended the presentations of the students they guided throughout this process, they would have realized that they did make a difference to a certain degree in that they demonstrated to these young, impressionable minds that if they come together and face an issue in their community, a change can take place, whether it be soon or later in time. The sense of unity that was felt throughout the event was manifest in the eagerness of the students to express themselves and the support they offered to one another. All those that participated in this project and directed these students in the right path towards higher education and a heightened feeling of active community should feel proud for the knowledge they have imparted. Through Project Citizen, both the younger students and the University students have recognized that there exist alternative forms of education in which action can be taken in order to gain learning that will benefit them in the future.
Closing Reflections on Project Citizen

I do not feel that I know enough about Project Citizen and its effects (a nation-wide program) to comment on it generally, but I do feel that it should not be incorporated as mandatory into the CSU Stanislaus Honors Program Service Learning Project class in the future.

For one thing, the program was too short, and because the class is only a semester long, I don’t see how this can be remedied. That is, the students allocating the program know beforehand that the poster (the ultimate end product) has very little to zero chance of generating any change in public policies for the kids involved. And this is perhaps why the poster is pursued and not actual change—because a month or three is simply not enough time. At the tutorial session I went to in the winter, one of the speakers mentioned a success story in Florida: third-graders managed to get some kind of policy in their cafeteria changed (I do not recall any specifics). However, given my experience, I feel that this was likely an “exception to the rule,” and I wonder about what kind of factors differed from those constituting my own experience.

While the project did generate some enthusiasm among a few students, they were just a few. And the students affected seemed to me to be those already harboring an interest in generating change: the two that ultimately got involved in the poster and were supposed to present it on May 4 were the class president and vice president (though the latter apparently moved just before the show and had another go in his place). The vice president was one of the most vocal in discussing the problem to be addressed, and the president seemed to me to be the most persevering in her search for information regarding her topic (when we all jumped on the Internet on the third day).

Now, I did feel that the program had a positive affect, especially on those that presented. They did a beautiful job, and they received encouragement—and that is important. However, the fact is that they did not change anything. They “went through the motions,” as it were, posted some things on a poster that they probably complained about to others generally, showed some folks their concerns, and then heard us tell them that they did a great job. And they did—but “technically,” they did a “great job” doing what we asked. Their goals remained unachieved, and perhaps even unrealized. I say “unrealized” because, again, the class was essentially pretending to want to change things. Overall, the class argued about what was lame and what was not, but according to the presenters on May 4, it was only they that had really gotten involved in the poster production.

Of course, there is the possibility of the students pursuing their perceived needs for change on their own, after the semester has ended, but I think they would do this anyway, insofar as they see change as possible and practical. The project, while implicitly presuming that change was possible, did not actually change anything during the course in which it was implemented. This means that the only change the project can have had (at least so far as I can tell from my own experience) was in an indirect way. While the end presentation on May 4 was a good thing for the two students that attended, counting on that static encouragement, a kind of byproduct for two or three students after approaching an entire classroom, seems to me to be like shooting with one’s eyes closed, hoping they hit something. On the one hand, they might; on the other hand, they might
improve their chances by opening their eyes. That is, the aim of Project Citizen has never been altogether clear to me. Is it generating knowledge of how to approach changing public policy? I do not feel that the program revealed how to generate change in any qualitatively different manner from how they would go about approaching change had they not been involved with the project. Is it generating a will to change at all? I feel that the project did not inspire a will to change where there was not already one there.

There are two constituencies that have been involved in this project: the students at CSU Stanislaus in the Service Learning Project class and the students approached by them. “Community service” is quite vague and quite open to interpretation, and insofar as “service learning” is a program that incorporates “community service” into an individual’s formal education, the notion should be discussed by those involved extensively. I feel that it should be up to the students in the Service Learning Project to decide upon what sorts of ways they can/should contribute to their community/communities given their time allotment (one semester). They should also be allowed the option of disagreeing with each other. The “going through the motions” of Project Citizen (and of formal education generally, I think) seems like it is intended to avoid that: since many will disagree on the most pressing issues, Project Citizen outlines only that “process” by which issues are addressed, rather than what issues are, in fact, more pressing than others—that’s too subjective. In short, I feel that that subjectivity should be encouraged. If a future class does disagree, I think the students should be allowed to spend the semester researching the “pros” and “cons” and presenting them to each other or perhaps they could simply act as individuals, pursuing their own interests and independent research/project(s) however they may manifest themselves (with the approval of the supervising body/bodies, of course).

I am by no means suggesting that Project Citizen should be removed as an option to pursue by forthcoming students in the Service Learning Project class; I only suggest that it should be just that.
Concluding Thoughts and Proposals for Improvement

Project Citizen is a praiseworthy program. It provides a logical structure for policy change in the classroom that is generally easy for students and instructors alike to follow. With that said, the CSU, Stanislaus, Honors class involved believes that the program would be far more effective given different direction and implementation.

Throughout the semester, the Honors students involved believed that Project Citizen was to be presented to the school site students as a very real tool for policy change. The facilitators presented it as such, stressing to the students that here was a true chance for them to change undesirable policies at their school or local levels. It was not until the end of the semester that the Honors students themselves realized the program was more of a learning tool; actual implementation was never a major goal of the program. After the poster board created by the students was presented, the whole concept seemed to fade away, as no further direction would be provided to any of the students who might wish to continue the process. The Project Citizen handbook closes with reflection questions, not further suggestions for how the students might pursue their policy change of choice. If Project Citizen is intended as a learning experience, rather than a real-world application of policy change, then the leaders of the program should be made to understand this fact from the very start in order to avoid possible confusion, as the CSUS Honors students experienced.

More important, however, is the fact that changes must be made to Project Citizen’s implementation. There were simply too many parties involved with the trial groups. CSUS Honors students, CSUS Honors faculty, CSUS Service Learning faculty, SCOE employees and administration, site administration, site instructors, and site students were all involved in Project Citizen’s web of involvement. Although such a collaborative effort seems ideal in theory, in practice it results in too many lines crossing and a lack of information for all involved. Case in point: when arriving at school sites A and B, the facilitators found their situations to be drastically different from what they had been led to believe. As a result, their lesson plans were defunct, and new plans had to be devised with very little preparation. Other examples exist of miscommunication, and Project Citizen’s potential was not fully realized as a result. Either fewer groups should be involved with the program in the future, or those involved should maintain closer ties with one another, particularly with the school site personnel.

Despite the aforementioned difficulties with Project Citizen’s trial run, the program certainly has potential. School site C in particular demonstrated how effective the program was in gaining and sustaining students’ interest in public policy. If these concerns are addressed, future assessments of Project Citizen may find this positive result increased considerably.
A Civic Alternative to Project Citizen

After participating in class discussions for the Service Learning project, and observing the slow progress made by the facilitators and researchers with Project Citizen, I came to the conclusion that several factors contributed to whether or not the project was successful at the different sites. The most important of these factors were the attitudes of the students towards the project, the environment in which the students were engaged (either in a classroom setting or an after-school program setting), and the consistency in the group of students the facilitators worked with over the time of the project. The project seemed to be more effective in a classroom setting, which also stimulated higher interest and had a higher consistency rate in students working on the project.

A good outside example of this classroom effectiveness is in a middle school natural resources class located in Beaver, Oregon. The students in that class have successfully followed through with a project linked to the local park service after identifying a need for healthier forests in their community.

The natural resources class of Nestucca Valley Middle School in Oregon has begun and successfully carried out a service-learning project that has had a positive effect on the students, their school, and the community. The keys to their success are rather simple in that they have had constant community and school support throughout the entire process, as well as a structured program and important lessons being taught along the way.

The very first thing they did was think over the needs of their community, then settle on the fact that the nearby forest was not diverse or healthy enough, which needed to be fixed so that the forest could thrive and the community would have a longer time to enjoy it. Then, with the aid of the Bureau for Land Management, the students made their plan come to life as they secured plots of land and began to figure out how to best manage the sections of forest.

An interesting concept in their project was that the students were given the responsibility of managing the plots while being taught the proper mathematics and natural science ideas that would help them manage the land. This process of learning and applying a concept while affecting the community no doubt gave the students the feeling that their ideas mattered and that they could do good things for their community.

The process was also very structured: the students learned all that they needed to during school hours in order to properly take care of the plots, had adequate transportation to and from the park, were engaged in meaningful reflections periodically with the entire class to think about what they were doing, and had close ties to the community organization that led the area of service (the BLM) as well as full support from the school and community.

Another interesting point is that students created picture and video presentations of their work to show the community what they had done, which gave some tangible evidence to show they had effectively helped out a government organization while at the same time learning valuable information about their environment.

Several ideas can be taken from this school's project to ensure the success of Project Citizen in the future. It seems that the idea of coming up with tangible products that the students can show to the community as proof of their accomplishments increases the positive attitudes in the class and the quality of the work done on the project. Along with a structured classroom environment and close community support, the possibilities for instilling in junior high students a desire to contribute to their community is endless.
Salisbury High School in Maryland, which has grades from Kindergarten to 12th grade, was selected as the partner for a project initiated by professors from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore’s Department of Engineering and Aviation Science. This project was designed to enhance science and math education for middle school and high school students. “Math and Science education in the high schools in the United States will require significant improvement and restructuring to conform to the quality and the quantity of professionals skilled in these areas that are necessary to keep pace with the continued national economic growth.”

According to the University, “service learning seems an ideal vehicle to introduce the well-documented benefits of experiential learning, the community (national) need to improve mathematics and science education in middle/high schools, and curriculum objectives…” (ibid). The design project was performed as a requirement for the students taking Engineering Mechanics courses at the university. In the process of implementing this project, it was decided that a continued effort should be supported to provide tools for teachers in order to implement other projects of the sort in local high schools, as well. The projects were aimed towards enhancing mathematics and science education and were supervised by the engineering and physics majors at the university.

The preparation phase of the project involved reviewing the relevant textbooks used by the school students and holding discussions with the middle and high school science teachers to elaborate on the topics covered in Engineering Mechanics. A decision was made “to build a simple mechanism that will visually reinforce concepts related to Newton’s laws of motion and mechanical advantage in simple machines, using a lever arm, pulley systems, and springs” (ibid). The project’s design requirements were established by the high school teachers and facilitators. The students were able to follow the objectives, design and manufacture the mechanisms, and produce engineering drawings.

According to the research team, “the project was completed successfully.” A high school student gave a presentation and demonstration of the project to the Engineering Mechanics (Statistics) class at the university and again at the high school. “An instructor’s handbook with ten lesson plans and notes for the teacher as well as overhead transparencies have been developed and donated to the school along with the device” (ibid). The teachers will use the curriculum and the device in order to teach the concepts that are required to understand the relevant principles of physics. “They will also document and make available suggestions for modifications and improvements” produced by future students, “as well as an assessment of how the device may have helped with their instruction and expected outcome” (ibid). Efforts are currently underway to expand the scope of the project.
Civic Responsibility Survey

Circle the community with which you most closely identify:

my city my school my neighborhood my country

For each of the following statements, circle the response that best matches your attitude:

1. I feel comfortable sharing my opinion in this community.
   yes no to some extent why bother

2. What I do in my community can make a difference.
   yes no only when others pay attention why bother

3. It is important for me to be involved in this community.
   yes no somewhat not really

4. My opinion matters in the community.
   yes no somewhat not very much

5. I take advantage of opportunities to help in this community.
   yes no sometimes very seldom

6. There are problems in my community that affect me.
   often not at all sometimes very seldom

7. I know ways I can help with problems in this community.
   yes, definitely no, not at all why bother

8. I feel I can contribute to making better policies in this community.
   yes, definitely no, not at all perhaps I don’t know how

9. People in this community help each other solve problems together.
   yes no sometimes only rarely

10. Helping others is rewarding for me.
    yes no to some extent not really
Circle the letter next to the response you think best answers the following questions:

11. What is public policy?
   A. A town meeting
   B. A good way to solve community problems
   C. A way to avoid solving problems
   D. Something that doesn’t affect me

12. Which of the following tasks should be done first when trying to influence the development of public policy?
   A. Present a solution
   B. Gather information
   C. Avoid the problem
   D. Identify a problem

13. Which of these following steps should be completed first, before the others?
   A. Propose a new policy
   B. Examine alternative policies
   C. Develop an action plan

14. What is the most important thing to do when developing an action plan?
   A. Know your audience
   B. Resist suggestions you don’t agree with
   C. Don’t bother; it’s not worth the effort
   D. Assume everyone understands the problem

15. Are you interested in the process of trying to help shape public policy?
   A. Yes, I like the idea of participating in this process, and I know how to help
   B. Yes, but I don’t know really know yet what to do to help shape policy
   C. Kind of, but I’m not really sure I can be of any help
   D. Not really; after all, who’s going to pay attention to what someone my age thinks should be done about a problem in my community?