



Activists, Non-activists, and Allies: Civic Engagement and Student Types at MSIs

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Higher education institutions across the country aim to contribute to students' ability to become active citizens. Civic engagement has long been an emphasis of higher education and has become a focal point from innovations such as the Carnegie Foundation's elective classification for community engagement and service-learning (Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski, 2011). Researchers have demonstrated that foundational values of democratic engagement including inclusiveness, relationships between students who engaged in cross-racial interactions, co-curricular activities and diversity experiences are related to higher levels of civic awareness and engagement (Bowman, 2011; Hurtado and DeAngelo, 2012). Furthermore, students who participated in protests were more likely to have complex thinking about democracy and awareness of global problems. Civic engagement is embedded in the history of minority student groups on college campuses, with their influence on increased access and resources, as well as their fight for more inclusive and productive campus environments (Abrego, 2008; Gasman et al., 2015; Borjian, 2018). Although civic engagement has been examined across various student groups, there is limited research on the impact of civic engagement at minority-serving institutions. This study uses a large-scale, cross-sectional approach to analyze college students' participation in civic engagement activities at 24 minority-serving institutions from 2013 to 2017 using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Aspects of civic engagement examined include students' participation in events that address social or political issues, frequency of interactions with diverse others, participation in leadership and service-learning activities, and perceptions of their institution's contribution to their growth in areas such as becoming an informed and active citizen. Additionally, researchers explored students' ability to resolve conflicts that involve bias and prejudice and contribute to the well-being of their community; how frequently students inform themselves of state, national, or global issues; and how they may organize others around a common cause. The data led to the creation of three types of student activists. The results have implications for student affairs professionals, administrators, and faculty to redefine how students participate in civic engagement activities, to shape civic education experiences on their campus, and to help students learn how to find and use their voices.

Keywords: civic engagement, minority serving institution, student activism, free speech, student engagement

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities have long been sites for the cultivation and expression of civic skills and abilities. Formal civics education began as an integral part of the American curriculum, dating from the early years of the republic, followed by more active expressions of civic engagement including social organizing and protests that emerged on most colleges and universities during times of war and the civil rights movement. More recent expressions of civic engagement include the Black Lives Matter campaigns against systemic racism, and new levels of campus activism around issues of free speech and social justice leading up to and immediately following the 2016 national election. Students on college campuses throughout the country are inspiring and experiencing new forms of civic engagement.

Civic engagement goals for higher education are defined as assuring that students develop the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make a difference in the civic life of their communities through both political and non-political processes (Ehrlich, 2000). Standards for civic engagement are reified in the elective Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, which has identified 361 institutions for their commitment to community partnerships and for preparing educated, engaged citizens and addressing critical societal issues. Yet, calls for heightening the emphasis on civic outcomes and experiences have grown stronger since 2012 with the advent of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) (CLDE) release of *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, which proffered a call for higher education to reclaim its civic mission and to make civic learning expected rather than optional. Although public colleges and universities have a special commitment to civic education, the history of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), which were established to address racial injustice and typically promote strong civic and service-oriented missions, makes them particularly important sites for studying civic engagement.

The historical mission of MSIs, combined with the increased push for civic outcomes and the current day, post-2016 national election racial climate, makes it more important than ever to examine the quality of civic engagement at MSIs. Understanding the extent to which students at MSIs are experiencing civic engagement activities, assessments of students' level of activism, and information about the relationship between civic participation and overall engagement in educationally effective practice, are important to the study of trends in civic education and to documenting the current state of the unique civic and service mission of MSIs. Understanding students' behavioral patterns as they relate to activism is critical in supporting their collegiate experience; University of Pennsylvania's Center for Minority Serving Institutions has forayed into this area by examining voter registration trends (Martinez and Hallmark, 2018). This study presents an exploratory study of MSI student participation in civic engagement activities using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)¹, a large-scale, multi-year,

quantitative dataset which includes 24 MSIs. To focus on the experiences of students at MSIs, we adopted a person-centered rather than a variable-centered approach (Malcom-Piqueux, 2015). We grouped students based on their level of engagement in a variety of civic-minded behaviors to create three distinct types of students at MSIs: *Activists*, *Non-Activists*, and *Allies*. We explore these student groups across varying types of minority serving institutions, examining their demographic and student characteristics, and finally looking at their engagement in other important educational experiences. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- How do students at MSIs engage in activist-based behavior?
- How does this activist behavior differ by student characteristics?
- How do these activist behaviors relate to other important forms of student engagement?

Each of the three student types had unique characteristics and behaviors based on how they engaged civically. Students exemplified different civic characteristics of mediating conflict, organizing around a collective cause, and capacity to inform themselves or others about an issue.

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Higher education institutions across the country aim to contribute to students' ability to become active citizens. Civic engagement has long been an emphasis of higher education, and it has become a focal point from initiatives such as the Carnegie Foundation's elective classification for community engagement and service-learning (Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski, 2011). Researchers have identified that foundational values of democratic engagement including inclusiveness, relationships between students who engaged in cross-racial interactions, co-curricular activities and diversity experiences are related to higher levels of civic awareness and engagement (Bowman, 2011; Hurtado and DeAngelo, 2012). Furthermore, students who participated in protests were more likely to demonstrate complex thinking about democracy and awareness of global problems.

Civic engagement in higher education is an amorphous concept due to changing definitions over time and its inclusion of countless constructs (Jacoby, 2009; Woolard, 2017). Countryman (2012) specifically argues civic engagement should challenge students to contemplate the racial injustices in the United States, while Purce (2014) believes civic engagement is a broad habit that needs to develop within students through experiences interacting with the world around them. To see a variety of ideas about what it means to be civically engaged, look no further than the missions of higher education institutions, each espousing a unique way to cultivate civic engagement and citizenship. Ambiguity in defining civic education makes it difficult to create and promote experiences for students (Woolard, 2017). On the national front, both academic and student affairs organizations such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and National Association of

¹Survey Instrument. Available online at: http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/survey_instruments.cfm

Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) advocate for civic engagement at colleges and universities. Respectively, AAC&U's VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement was introduced to assess the level of students' civic learning and *Learning Reconsidered* beckoned professionals to create environments on campuses for civic participation (Rudolph, 1977; Keeling, 2004; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009) reminds us that the aim to develop students into contributing society members is not a new concept. Similarly, free speech movements and student activism on college campuses are not new occurrences (Council on Higher Education in American Republics, 1970; Downs, 2005; Ben-Porath, 2017; Chemerinsky and Gillman, 2017).

Colleges and universities are sometimes portrayed as metaphorical bubbles protected from the public sphere, yet they are often thrust in the spotlight of larger problems (Sampson, 1967; Canter and Englot, 2014). The free speech movement, for example, stems back to the 1960s when students took over control of a building on Berkeley's campus (Downs, 2005). Similarly, students at Alabama State University, an HBCU, found themselves at the center of federal court in *Dixon v. Alabama (1961)* for protests during the Civil Rights Movement; the outcome notably ending in loco parentis (Njoku et al., 2017). Although some causes or social issues may be specific to different institutions, there is a common theme across institutions of civic engagement being inspired by needs that appear to be unmet (Council on Higher Education in American Republics, 1970). There is a long-held debate over whether universities should allow student activism to propagate freely or if faculty and administrators should squelch it (Council on Higher Education in American Republics, 1970; Chemerinsky and Gillman, 2017). Free speech is seen by some as an excuse to demean and perpetuate the notion of the inferiority of marginalized groups while others believe it is a politically correct movement aimed to silence opposing views (Ben-Porath, 2017). Oftentimes the diversity movement and the free speech movement become intertwined, resulting in conflict. True diversity is sometimes seen as an acceptance of all differences yet political correctness forces the hands of administrators to develop policies counterintuitive to openness (Downs, 2005). In this way, institutions of higher education can perpetuate an oppressive culture limiting the experiences of students (e.g., institutions not allowing cheerleaders on football fields during the national anthem as they follow the controversial Colin Kaepernick protests by kneeling; Roll, 2017).

Factors that affect student unrest include the type of educational environment, individual student values, and history (Keniston, 1967). Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) are a niche type of college or university with special missions and histories yet some of their characteristics, such as public or private control, also overlap with other institutional types (Jackson Mercer and Stedman, 2008). Federal legislation paved the way for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; Albritton, 2012) and Tribal Colleges or Universities (TCUs; Merisotis and O'Brien, 1998) while some MSIs earn the distinction through enrollment patterns. For example, Predominately Black Institution (PBIs) must serve at least 40% Black American students (US Department of Education, 2017),

and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) must have at least 25% of their undergraduate population coming from Hispanic communities. MSIs are intended to have a strong connection to their purpose, often reflected in their missions. Regarding civic education, Jacoby (2009) stated institutions of higher education let their values guide their goals; "Faith-based institutions often gravitate to a social justice focus, while historically black institutions, community colleges, and urban universities may prefer a definition grounded in community partnerships or public problem solving" (p. 10).

Explorations of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities at MSIs has demonstrated positive and unique benefits (Bridges et al., 2008; Kuh, 2009). Students find staff at HBCUs and HSIs more supportive of their social needs than at Predominantly-White Institutions (PWIs) (Bridges et al., 2008). African American students at HBCUs reported their collegiate experience contributed to their civic engagement more so than their peers at PWIs (Bridges et al., 2008). However, research has shown only small differences between HSIs and PWIs for Hispanic or Latinx student experiences regarding student engagement (Bridges et al., 2008). When institutional efforts are channeled effectively toward educational practices, MSIs are beneficial for their students (Kuh, 2009). While engagement has been studied broadly at MSIs, little research has focused specifically on civic engagement.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Civic engagement is embedded in the history MSIs, and of minority student groups on college campuses. The push for equity of access and for resources as well as the fight for more inclusive and productive campus environments, has fostered activism at MSIs and among historically underserved students (Abrego, 2008; Gasman et al., 2015; Borjian, 2018). Although civic engagement has been examined across various student groups, there is limited research on the nature and impact of civic engagement at MSIs. MSIs have generally been understudied by researchers (Merisotis and O'Brien, 1998). Most research conducted on student-faculty interaction (Sax et al., 2005; Kim and Sax, 2009) and student activism has been based on PWIs (Keniston, 1967; Sampson, 1967). Because students are central to the function of colleges and universities, it is important to tell their stories. Specifically, students' role in civic engagement and activism, and for creating change makes it critical to understand the behavioral patterns of students as they relate to activism in their collegiate experience.

METHODS

Data

The data for this study come from the 2013 through 2017 annual administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE asks about student engagement in various effective educational practices, perceptions of college environments, and how students spend their time in and out of the classroom. Participating institutions had the option to add brief item sets, called Topical Modules, to the end of their NSSE administration.

This study focuses on the more than 12,000 first-year and senior student respondents from the 24 MSIs that elected to administer NSSE's Civic Engagement Topical Module between 2013 and 2017. The items in this set examined student participation in events that address social or political issues as well as students' experiences resolving conflicts that involve bias and prejudice and contributing to the well-being of their community.

Measures

A series of items from the Civic Engagement Topical Module, several demographic items, and select items from the NSSE core survey were the focus of this study. Items from the Civic Engagement module² were combined to create three scales: (1) the *Conflict Resolution* scale that asked students about their ability to help resolve conflicts and bring together individuals of different backgrounds, (2) the *Information/Knowledge* scale that asked students about whether they had discussions and sought out knowledge about local, national or global issues, and (3) the *Organizing* scale that asked students about their experience with raising awareness of issues and organizing situations where various issues are addressed. Component items and scale details can be found in **Table 1**. Demographic variables of interest were racial/ethnic identification, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, class level, major field, and first-generation status. NSSE core survey variables of interest consisted of the scale measures *Reflective & Integrative Learning*, *Collaborative Learning*, *Discussions with Diverse Others*, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, *Quality of Interactions*, and *Supportive Environment*; and single items including, student involvement in service-learning and leadership opportunities; and student-perceptions of how their institution has contributed to their development of personal values and ethics, working with others, understanding people of diverse backgrounds, and being an informed and active citizen.

Respondents

Students at 24 MSIs that participated in at least one NSSE administration between 2013 and 2017 were included in this study. The largest group of NSSE-participating MSIs were Hispanic Serving Institutions (17), followed by Historically Black Colleges/Universities (4). Additionally, the data included respondents from Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving (ANNH) institutions (2), Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (ANNAPISI) (2), a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) (1), and a Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution (1). Three of the participating MSIs had more than one MSI designation. The majority of MSIs in the data are Master's Colleges and Universities and half are public institutions. This sample of MSIs is not representative of MSIs in the U.S., but provides relevant, available data to explore our question. Furthermore, due to the uneven numbers in each MSI category, only an analysis across all 24 MSIs was explored.

²Topical Module. Available online at: http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/modules/2017/NSSE_2017_Civic_Engagement_Module.pdf

The student respondents in this study consisted of 4,818 first-year and 7,195 senior students who responded to the NSSE core items and the Civic Engagement Topical Module set. Around 69% of respondents identified as women, and 59% were first-generation students, with the average age of respondents being 26 ($SD = 9.47$). The largest racial/ethnic groups were White students (34%), Hispanic or Latino students (26%) and Black or African American (13%). The largest proportions of students majored in Business (19%), followed by 16% majoring in Health Professions, and 12% majoring in Social Sciences. One in ten (10%) respondents identified with having a diagnosed disability or impairment.

Analyses

Due to the exploratory and introductory nature of our investigation into the civic engagement of students at MSIs, much of our analysis is descriptive. Also, akin to Malcom-Piqueux's (2015) person-centered approach to analysis, which approaches the study of individuals who share similar attributes or experiences by identifying qualitative differences among individuals in these shared categories, we first grouped students based on their participation in civic behaviors and then looked to see who comprised these groups. To answer our first research question about how students at MSIs engage in activist-based behavior, we first conducted a two-step cluster analysis. After an examination of percentile distributions and preliminary clusters of activist-based behavior, a three-cluster solution was selected. We then looked at how the proportions of these three groups of students varied at the 24 institutions included in our study. To answer our second and third research questions exploring how the characteristics of students varied in these three groups and how these groups engage in other ways, we examined descriptive results.

RESULTS

How do Students at MSIs Engage in Activist-Based Behavior?

We found three distinct patterns of activist-based engagement amongst students at MSIs. Respondents who were high on all Civic Engagement scales were in cluster 1. We labeled this cluster *Activists*, as they are students who were highly engaged in civic activities. The second cluster, *Non-Activists*, was comprised of respondents who reported the lowest involvement in conflict resolution and being knowledgeable about civic engagement activities and with relatively low involvement in organizing civic engagement activities. We labeled the third cluster *Allies*, as it included respondents who were fairly educated about civic engagement information, high on conflict resolution but had the lowest involvement in organizing civic engagement activities. Overall, *Allies* made up the largest portion of students at MSIs (45.5%), followed by *Non-Activists* (30.8%) and then *Activists* (23.7%). See **Table 2** for Civic Engagement scores for each of these groups.

We found, however, that there was a notable amount of variation in the proportions of these separate groups at

TABLE 1 | Select civic engagement items and scale information.

Conflict resolution scale

Select the response that best represents your ability to do the following

Response options: 1 (Poor) to 7 (Excellent)

- Help people resolve their disagreements with each other
- Resolve conflicts that involve bias, discrimination, and prejudice
- Lead a group in which people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included
- Contribute to the well-being of your community

Range: 0–120
 Mean: 84.65
 SD: 23.97
 α : 0.883
 ICC: 0.0139

Knowledge/Informing scale

During the current school year, whether course-related or not, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: *Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never*

- Informed yourself about local or campus issues
- Informed yourself about state, national or global issues
- Discussed local or campus issues with others
- Discussed state, national, or global issues with others

Range: 0–60
 Mean: 31.20
 SD: 14.61
 α : 0.827
 ICC: 0.0122

Organizing scale

During the current school year, whether course-related or not, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: *Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never*

- Raised awareness about local or campus issues
- Raised awareness about state, national, global issues
- Asked others to address local or campus issues
- Asked others to address state, national, or global issues
- Organized others to work on local or campus issues
- Organized others to work on state, national, or global issues

Range: 0–60
 Mean: 15.31
 SD: 15.48
 α : 0.926
 ICC: 0.0298

TABLE 2 | Student groups based on cluster analysis of civic engagement scales.

	Activists		Non-active		Allies	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Organizing	35.69	13.20	10.79	11.33	7.68	7.65
Conflict resolution	99.90	16.89	57.24	16.87	95.35	13.16
Knowledge/Informing	47.41	9.84	25.67	12.17	26.46	11.76

individual campuses. The proportion of *Activist* students ranged from 17 to 40% of respondents at our 24 MSI institutions. Only two institutions (Institution 1 and 2) had more than a third of their students behaving as *Activists*. Proportions of students who engaged in *Non-Activist* behaviors ranged between one in five (20%) to half (48%) of students on the campuses studied. Similarly varied, students engaged as *Allies* ranged from 25 to 57% of students on MSI campuses. Four institutions (Institutions 10, 18, 20, and 21) had more than half of respondents who behaved as *Allies*. The three institutions (Institutions 22, 23, and 24) that had <20% *Activists* had at least 30% *Non-Activist* and *Ally* students. The two institutions (Institution 12 and 23) that had students exhibiting *Non-Activist* behavior above 40% had less than a quarter of respondents who behaved as *Activists* and low percentages of respondents who behaved as *Allies*. More information about the proportions of students in these civic-engagement related groups by individual institution can be found in **Table 3**.

How Does Activist Behavior Differ by Student Characteristics?

The demographic and student makeup of our three civic engagement groups differed in many notable ways. Around one-third of students who identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (38%), Black or African American (31%) or Other (31%) were *Activists* while large proportions of students identifying as White (49%), Multiracial (48%), or Hispanic or Latino (45%) were *Allies*. First-generation students were more likely to be *Allies* (45%) or *Non-Activists* (31%). Although students who identified as men or women were more likely to be *Allies* (42 and 47%, respectively), students who identified with another gender identity or preferred not to respond to the gender identity question were overrepresented as *Non-Activists* (38 and 42%, respectively). Straight students were most represented as *Allies* (42%), but LGBTQ+ students were more evenly divided as *Activists* (24%), *Non-Activists* (37%), and *Allies* (35%). Students with a diagnosed disability or impairment were slightly more likely to be *Activists* (27%) than students without a diagnosed disability or impairment (23%). About half (47%) of seniors engaged in *Ally* behavior while less than one in five (18%) of first-years engaged in *Activist* behavior. Approximately one-third (33%) of students majoring in Communications, Media, and Public Relations were *Activists*, while two in five students (43%) majoring in Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science and over half (52%) of students with Undeclared/Undecided majors acted as *Non-Activists*. Large proportions of students majoring in Business (49%) and Health Professions (48%) were *Allies*. More

TABLE 3 | Proportions of civic engagement student groups by institution.

	Activists (%)	Non-Active (%)	Allies (%)
Institution 1	39.5	25.9	34.6
Institution 2	35.6	33.3	31.1
Institution 3	29.5	28.2	42.3
Institution 4	29.4	30.3	40.2
Institution 5	29.2	35.4	35.4
Institution 6	28.7	32.4	38.8
Institution 7	28.3	27.0	44.7
Institution 8	27.9	29.4	42.8
Institution 9	27.1	28.7	44.2
Institution 10	26.7	20.3	53.0
Institution 11	26.2	34.4	39.3
Institution 12	25.8	48.5	25.8
Institution 13	25.6	32.1	42.2
Institution 14	25.1	36.4	38.5
Institution 15	24.0	31.6	44.4
Institution 16	23.7	29.4	46.9
Institution 17	23.0	34.0	43.0
Institution 18	22.6	23.3	54.1
Institution 19	22.5	38.1	39.4
Institution 20	22.0	20.9	57.2
Institution 21	20.7	28.0	51.4
Institution 22	19.7	36.2	44.1
Institution 23	19.1	41.1	39.8
Institution 24	16.5	34.8	48.7

details about the demographic and student characteristics of our three civic-engagement groups can be found in **Tables 4, 5**, respectively.

How do Activist Behaviors Relate to Other Important Forms of Student Engagement?

Students who participated in leadership experiences were mostly notably represented as *Activists* (42%) and *Allies* (38%). Students who participated in a course that included a service-learning component were more likely to be represented as *Activists* (28%) than students whose courses did not include a service-learning component (17%). See **Table 5** for more details about the proportions of our three civic engagement groups and those that participated in these two experiential learning opportunities.

Activists had higher mean scores on Reflective and Integrative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Discussions with Diverse Others, Student-Faculty Interaction, Quality of Interactions, and Supportive Environment. Non-Activists had the lowest means for these measures of engagement. Allies' scores were between these two groups. Similarly, Activists reported that their institution contributed more strongly to their skills and development in creating a personal code of values and ethics, working effectively with others, understanding people of other backgrounds, and being an informed and active citizen, followed by Allies, and leaving Non-Activists perceiving the lowest gains in these areas. See **Table 6** for more details.

Limitations

Institutions self-select participation in NSSE administrations and additionally opt to add Topical Modules such as the set of items studied here. As a result, there is some lack of generalizability in these findings given institutions' reasons for selecting the additional item set varies. Results from this study should not be generalized beyond this sample of MSIs and interpretations of these results outside of this context should be done with caution. As we saw in this study, there was a wide variety in the representation of civic-engagement groups across institutions, and there is likely a wide variety of variation in behavior within these groups. The variation among MSIs suggests there is value to exploring the campus context, but NSSE's data privacy agreements prevent us from identifying institutions to do this more in-depth study. Additionally, the collapsing of students into various identity groups, and similarly the aggregation of a greatly varied group of institutions, may further hide distinctions in student behaviors. Results may not necessarily apply to all subpopulations of students or all MSIs and this variation should be further examined in future research.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Civic engagement is a longstanding focus of higher education in the United States. Yet, more recent emphasis has focused on strengthening this civic mission, the assessment of civic engagement, and the educational benefits of these experiences. The civic engagement experience of students at MSIs are of particular interest given MSI's history of activism. Our study offers a glimpse of the civic engagement experience of students at MSIs, how these behaviors vary by student characteristics, and lends insight into the relationship between activist behaviors and other forms of student engagement.

Results of this exploratory study show a distinct pattern of civic behaviors among students at MSIs, suggesting three groups: *Activists*, *Allies*, and *Non-Activists*. We imagine *Activists* to be students who view themselves as champions of a cause, on the frontlines organizing events and informing others about issues. *Allies* excel at helping others resolve conflict, standing by the sides of their *Activist* peers, but they do very little of the organizing themselves. In contrast, *Non-Activists* are less likely to engage in social issues, yet are informed of social issues, but lack a notable amount of skill in conflict resolution. These three groups suggest distinct stories about the student experience with civic activities. The variation between MSIs is also worthy of notice. Several questions arise from this variation. Considering other findings on the effects of climate on different student populations at different types of institutions (i.e., Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005; Garvey et al., 2015; Harris and BrckaLorenz, 2017), one might reasonably conclude that this variation is due to the campus environment. Several factors on a campus might lead to larger proportions of activists such as a high frequency of civic activities, including controversial speakers, injustice awareness events and protests for a cause, or faculty and staff support of civic engagement activities including community organizing or service-learning, and particularly, visible forms of campus and community action.

TABLE 4 | Select identity characteristics by civic engagement student groups.

		Activists (%)	Non-active (%)	Allies (%)
First-generation student		23.5	31.2	45.3
Gender identity	Man	25.0	33.5	41.5
	Woman	22.7	30.6	46.7
	Another gender identity	27.0	37.8	35.1
	I prefer not to respond	25.0	42.0	33.0
Racial/Ethnic identity	American Indian or Alaska Native	21.4	47.8	30.8
	Asian	20.0	40.2	39.8
	Black or African American	30.5	27.0	42.5
	Hispanic or Latino	23.7	31.2	45.1
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	37.7	28.3	34.0
	White	21.4	29.9	48.7
	Other	30.5	27.5	41.9
	Multiracial	23.2	28.8	47.9
	I prefer not to respond	24.7	31.0	42.4
Disability status	Yes, has a diagnosed disability	26.6	29.8	43.7
	No, does not have a diagnosed disability	23.4	30.7	46.0
	Prefer not to respond	23.8	36.2	40.0
Sexual orientation	Straight	24.1	33.5	42.4
	LGBQ+	28.6	36.9	34.5
	I prefer not to respond	25.0	34.1	40.9

TABLE 5 | Select student characteristics and experiential activities by civic engagement student groups.

		Activists (%)	Non-active (%)	Allies (%)
Class level	First-year	18.4	39.0	42.6
	Senior	27.0	25.7	47.3
Major field	Arts and Humanities	22.6	35.2	42.1
	Bio. Sciences, Agric., and Nat. Resources	23.3	33.8	42.9
	Phys. Sciences, Math., and CS	17.8	43.0	39.2
	Social Sciences	29.1	24.6	46.3
	Business	23.5	27.4	49.2
	Comm., Media and Public Relations	33.1	31.1	35.8
	Education	23.1	31.9	45.0
	Engineering	19.0	36.5	44.4
	Health Professions	20.2	31.6	48.2
	Social Service Professions	29.5	25.9	44.6
	All Other	22.8	24.4	52.7
	Undecided, Undeclared	19.2	52.0	28.8
Courses included a service-learning component		27.5	27.9	44.6
Courses <i>did not</i> include a service-learning component		16.7	35.9	47.4
Participated in a leadership experience		42.2	19.4	38.4
<i>Did not</i> participate in a leadership experience		18.8	33.7	47.5

Interaction with faculty can lead to positive outcomes for students in political engagement and cultural cognizance (Sax et al., 2005) and faculty also support students by strategizing with them and helping them navigate politics or create campus change (Kezar, 2010). Relating this literature to our study suggests that institutions with larger proportions of *Activists* may have more faculty and staff activists and administrators that support student ambitions or that greater numbers of faculty and staff find it

important to mobilize students to action. Our finding about the variation between MSIs suggests there is value in conducting more in-depth examinations of the campus context and in particular, the relationship between faculty and staff support and civic engagement and activism.

One might further wonder about the “right mix” of these civic engagement groups. Institutions may want to consider what the right mix of civically engaged students would look

TABLE 6 | Select engagement indicators and perceived gains by civic engagement student groups.

		Activists M (SD)	Non-active M (SD)	Allies M (SD)
Engagement indicators (range 0–60)	Reflective and integrative learning	46.0 (11.2)	32.6 (12.0)	38.3 (12.2)
	Collaborative learning	38.0 (14.4)	29.1 (13.5)	32.1 (14.0)
	Discussions with diverse others	48.1 (13.9)	35.7 (16.7)	43.1 (16.0)
	Student-faculty interaction	32.1 (17.1)	18.6 (14.1)	20.5 (15.1)
	Quality interactions	45.3 (12.2)	37.1 (12.9)	42.8 (12.5)
	Supportive environments	39.9 (14.8)	30.9 (14.1)	34.0 (14.7)
Perceived gains (range 1–4)	Personal code of values and ethics	3.3 (0.9)	2.6 (0.9)	2.8 (1.0)
	Working effectively with others	3.3 (0.8)	2.7 (0.9)	3.0 (0.9)
	Understanding people of other backgrounds	3.3 (0.9)	2.7 (0.9)	2.9 (1.0)
	Being an informed and active citizen	3.2 (0.9)	2.5 (0.9)	2.7 (1.0)

like for their institution and then focus on providing students with the foundation for achieving those goals. It would be difficult to imagine institutions focused on creating civically responsible citizens hoping to maximize their proportions of *Non-Activist* behaving students. These students lagged behind their *Activist* and *Ally* peers most remarkably in conflict resolution. Institutions may want to first focus on ways to improve students' skills in resolving disagreements, pushing back on discrimination, leading inclusive groups, and contributing to the general well-being of others. The intentional design of learning experiences to, for example, foster students conflict resolution skills or capacity to address discrimination may well be outcomes that faculty and student affairs professionals could collaborate on to develop students' civic engagement competencies and to increase the proportion of *Activists* and *Ally* behaviors. Starting with a shift of students from *Non-Activists* to *Allies* could be one way to create communities where taking action for social and political issues is less necessary, or when necessary, is more supported. Given that the newest generation of students coming to our campuses are expecting activism to be part of their university experience (Kezar, 2010), institutions could be more intentional about creating educational experiences in and outside the classroom that are associated with the different types of civic engagement they hope to foster.

Seeing the variation of students within these groups additionally raises questions about the environment within major fields. Seeing larger proportions of *Activists* in fields such as Communications, Social Service Professions, and Social Sciences leads to more causal questions. We wonder if students who are more active in social and political causes are more likely to choose one of those major fields or if these major fields are inspiring more active behaviors. Larger proportions of *Non-Activist* students majoring in Physical Sciences and Engineering should spur these disciplinary fields to think about how conflict, discrimination, and non-inclusive spaces may negatively affect the students in their programs as well their capacity to address these issues in their future careers. It may be beneficial for these fields to consider how they might offer experiences associated with *Activist* or *Ally* groups, such as providing civic engagement activities and incorporating conflict resolution skills into courses,

labs, or student clubs. Faculty members in fields characterized by fewer *Activists* or *Ally* behaviors might begin by exposing students to readings or speakers that reflect civic engagement in the major field, and or to design assignments that invite students to discuss or take a stance on a field-specific injustice.

Because the mission of MSI's focus on the well-being and development of racial/ethnic minority students, it was interesting to see that some students of color were largely represented as *Non-Activists*. Close to half of American Indian or Alaska Native and Asian students exhibited *Non-Activist* behaviors. Students of color have long been on the frontlines of activism in higher education, so this finding is worthy of further study. This finding could be a limitation of our data which did not allow us to explore MSIs beyond the broad category. Future research may want to investigate whether this is a finding based on cultural differences of these students or if the MSI environment is somehow creating this difference. Multiracial students were also notably low in their representation as *Activists*, but they behave more strongly as *Allies* than the American Indian, Alaska Native, or Asian students.

Students in our *Activist* and *Allies* groups were generally more engaged in a variety of forms of effective educational practice. These students are doing more to connect their learning to societal issues, reflect on their own views and the perspectives of others, and take courses that include community-based projects. They also interact more with people who are different from them, work more collaboratively with their peers, and have more frequent and meaningful interactions with faculty outside of class. These students feel that they have a better quality of interactions with a wide variety of people at their institution and generally feel more supported both academically and personally. Given that they more strongly attribute their growth in knowledge, skills, and development in a variety of ways to their institution, speaks highly to the idea that institutional environments have an impact on students' civic development. Additionally, this can influence the support MSI faculty and staff provide students in their activism efforts. If MSI faculty and staff are working to engage students at their institution, this can lead to students feeling supported enough to move through the activist categories. It is also important for MSI faculty and staff

to be aware of the activist history at their institution to provide students eager to participate in activism a foundation from which to begin.

Student participation in leadership experiences has one of the most striking relationships with our civic engagement groups of all the other forms of engagement studied here. A very low proportion of students that had a leadership experience displayed *Non-Activist* behaviors while four in five students in a leadership experience behaved as *Activists* and *Allies*. Certainly, students inclined toward activity or interest in social and political causes would tend to take part in leadership experiences, but it is just as likely that these experiences encourage students to learn more about issues that affect others and give them the power to act. Institutions should find more ways to involve a variety of students in leadership experiences and help them to translate these skills into their future lives as active citizens.

The results of this study have implications for student affairs professionals, administrators, and faculty who are interested in assuring higher education's civic mission. Knowing more about the civic experiences and behaviors associated with three student

types at MSIs could influence educators to refine educational offerings to support civic outcomes and to help students learn how to find and use their voices. Leveraging qualitative research to obtain personal narratives of the students could be a future direction for researchers. Given the history of activism and protest at MSIs, it is important to document the current state of students' civic engagement and to explore ways to more intentionally shape the learning environment to assure students graduate with the civic experience and skills required of active and informed citizens.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study and protocol were approved by Indiana University's Institutional Review Board.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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