

When I conducted interviews in France, I asked each person the question "How can one be a good citizen?" After much thought, the general trend was that one must vote; maintain a healthy respect for the law, others, and oneself; offer and listen to ideas to facilitate political discussion; and stay well informed. When I traveled to France, I wanted to compare and contrast civic ideals and governmental involvement of high school students in France versus high school students in the United States.

However, in order to understand how French and American students are able to practice these habits that lead to good citizenship we must examine the availability of governmental education at the high school level. I found that there is a mandatory course called "Civic Education" in which junior high and high school students of France must spend at least 10 hours per year. The course focuses on things ranging from governmental structure, to political and social engagement, to sociopolitical questions. There is no mandatory course in the United States that focuses specifically on civic education. Seniors may take either American Studies or AP Government which focus on the history of the government, the governmental process, and various methods of governmental involvement. In earlier years, students learn about the essence of the law and the foundation of the government in history classes such as US History in junior year. This integrated approach to civic education seems to be more effective than the more targeted approach taken in the French system. Both American and French students can agree however, that the information presented in these courses is indeed valuable. When responding to the statement "Knowledge of how my government works would be useful for my future" both French and American students responded mostly positively with the American students responding "Very accurate" around 50% of the time and French students responding "Somewhat accurate" around 50% of the time.

When it comes to extracurricular programs available to students, involvement becomes complicated. Students in France normally have little free time due to the rigorous *rythme scolaire*

which often ends the school day as late as 6 pm. In the United States it is common for students in high school to have part-time jobs, to be involved in sports and clubs, and to participate in church organizations. While it is more difficult to be actively involved in outside activities in France, it is by no means impossible. The difference between France and the US is that in France it is more common to have one outside activity, whereas in the US many students have a whole host of outside activities in order to boost their résumés in order to appear more attractive to future colleges and scholarship committees. The programs available in both countries, while different, both serve to educate and integrate students into the political process. In France there is the Parlement des enfants. The participants are called “Junior Senators.” It commenced in France in 2000 just after the president of the National Assembly and the General director of UNESCO united young people from 174 countries and 5 continents to adopt the Manifesto of Young People of the 21st Century and form the Parliament of Young People in 1999. Another program available to young people in France is the Conseil des Délégués pour la Vie Lycéenne, or the CVL, which was created in 1991. There are delegates at the communal level and also at the regional level which are elected by their peers each school year. There are 400 communes across France. The students are able to communicate information about all aspects of school life to students and administrators, suggest improvements, and convey the positive changes they have affected. In the US students from many states may participate in Youth in Government, or YIG. YIG is joined with the YMCA and is considered a christian organization, sharing the same four core values as the YMCA which are: Honesty, Responsibility, Caring, Respect. There are four branches: Executive (Youth Governor and Governor's Cabinet), Judicial (Trial or Appellate), Legislative (House of Rep., Senate, or Freshman House) or Media (Broadcast, Print, or Social.) Each state does things a little bit differently. Some states include “faith” as a fifth YMCA value and some smaller programs don't have a media program. Oklahoma is a trailblazer in that it has a Freshman House and an Appellate program, both of which are almost unheard of outside of the state. Students gather each year for a three day conference in January to put on a conference. This is where the cases

are tried, the bills pass or fail, the newscast is produced, and the governor's race for the next year takes place. Youth in Government serves to provide students with a way to experience their government as they have never done so before. It allows students to take on the role of a lawmaker, a judge, or a journalist and to live out that dream in an entirely new way. This real life practice is extremely valuable because it shows students just how real their dreams can be with a little bit of hard work. Another program that allows students to gain an expanded world view and a more complete knowledge of the global political process is Model United Nations, also known as Model UN. Model UN is a simulation of the UN where students represent member nations and sit on committees. There are Model UN events at the junior high, high school, and even college level. Often at the high school and college level, the teams travel to other states and occasionally to other countries for the World Model UN Competition. Model UN allows students to gain a better understanding of what it means to be a good citizen of the world, as well as how international politics work.

Due to regulations in their student handbook, newspapers and other political information may only be presented to students if there are a variety of viewpoints represented. This prevents a bias from being transferred to the students. Nearly every person I spoke with was concerned with the issue of transference of political ideology from teacher to student; the strict regulations on political education are undoubtedly in place to calm this fear. This is in sharp contrast to the United States where the sentiment is that by freeing teachers from restrictions in regards to transference of political information, students are then able to make the most informed political decisions.

“Students are afraid of engaging in politics. There’s always political unrest.” This quote was taken from an interview with Charlotte Rokicki, Conseiller Principal d'Education. She was talking to me about the issues facing the current generation of young people. She said that with all of the chaos in the political arena students often feel apathetic because the problems seem to large and scary. This was

echoed in the many interviews I conducted during my stay in France. Political information is more readily available to students in France in the form of newspapers in the media center, poster and art exhibitions, and the occasional political demonstration in which students are able to participate. However, it seems that the availability of political information is serving to deter the students from becoming involved rather than informing them and inciting them to act. This is further supported by my survey when I asked students to respond to the statement: “ I understand how my government works”. The results showed that nearly four times the number of French students reported having very little knowledge of how their government works and 94% of American students answered positively as opposed to 80% of French students.

Margaux is an 18 year old art student. She isn't involved in any political clubs and her schedule is full of mostly “arts plastiques.” On paper, you wouldn't expect Margaux to be a politically informed and opinionated young person. I was in art class with Margaux showing her some of my photos when we came across some graffiti depicting a political message that was against president Hollande and his policies. Margaux then said that she didn't like him. I asked her why and she said that he wasn't charismatic, he wasn't depicting the proper image of France in foreign relations, and that he wasn't properly handling the suffering French economy. We further discussed her political views and she told me that Hollande's second in command isn't good either! I learned that the media plays a large role, in Margaux's opinion, in ridiculing Hollande and his administration. Everything from his economic policy to his personal affair is ceaselessly ridiculed on nightly television, she told me. When asked how often she watches the news, she said that she watches the national and international news nightly. She doesn't read newspapers, but she occasionally reads her father's political magazines. I asked Margaux how one could be a good citizen. She said that in order to be a good citizen, one must: vote, respect the law, refrain from complaining when one doesn't vote, respect others, and invest in one's own community. She said that she does feel responsible for her fellow citizen; however, she said that she does not think

that this sentiment is common at the high school level. She said that while helping one's fellow citizen is a part of the French government, there are not government courses in place to instill these values into students. I asked her if she thought that young people are sufficiently engaged in their government. She said absolutely not. She explained to me that young people simply aren't interested. She described it as a mix of things: the generation, lack of French patriotism in general, the lack of educational programs in schools about government, and the hush-hush culture surrounding young people and politics in schools.

One of the things I wanted to explore during my time in France was the question of social responsibility. I wanted to discover if the socialistic tendencies of the French government had an effect on the social attitudes of young people in regard to their obligation to help others. The discovery I made was fascinating and is best explained in two parts. Firstly, most of the French people I spoke with, both younger and older, expressed that a feeling of being responsible for one's fellow citizen is not common in France, especially among the youth. Secondly, the results of my survey (specifically in response to the statement "I feel responsible for my fellow citizen") show that an overwhelming number of students marked positive responses at around 60% with about 20% being neutral. The interviews I conducted also yielded this result. When contrasted with the answers given by American students, around 45% answered negatively and 30% were neutral. This shows that students from each country have different feelings about what constitutes civic responsibility. This sharp difference in attitudes of civic responsibility can be traced to the structure of each country's respective government.

My research into the similarities and differences of the civic ideals and methods of governmental involvement led me to discover that although French students are presented with large amount of balanced political information, they usually refrain from political engagement due to the constant unrest in the political arena. I also discovered that French students feel responsible for their fellow citizens, a sentiment not widely shared by their counterparts in the United States. In regards to

the programs available to the students, those in the US are afforded a more comprehensive political education as it is integrated into history and social studies classes throughout their primary and secondary years despite France providing a program specifically to educate students about civics in junior high and high school. During their free time, both French and American students have opportunities to get involved in their respective political processes and to learn about their governments; however, students in the US are more likely to join a larger number of these clubs due to the perceived need to build up an attractive résumé for colleges. This difference in involvement is also due to the strict time constraints of the French students' school week.