

Executive Summary
External On-Site Evaluation
Civitas International Civic Education Exchange Program

Civitas International Programs are directed by the Center for Civic Education (CCE) and funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Education for Democracy Act approved by the United States Congress. Additional support is provided by the U.S. Department of State and other sources

Ireland-Jordan-Colombia- Idaho Partnership

April 7-8, 2010, Idaho
April 18-21, 2010, Jordan
April 25-30, 2010, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland



Civitas students from
Jordan, Ireland, and Idaho

Conducted by Gary Marx, President
Center for Public Outreach, Vienna, Virginia

The Civitas External On-Site Evaluation

Since its founding in 1995, the Civitas International Civic Education Exchange Program (Civitas) has developed and provided support for partnerships that pair U.S. states with countries undergoing a transition to democracy. A primary aim is to enhance students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Since evaluation is a key component of this historically successful program, each Civitas partnership provides the Center for Civic Education (CCE) with quarterly progress reports. However, bottom-line, on-the-ground success of the program is confirmed through ongoing research and periodic external on-site evaluations. During 2010, external evaluator Gary Marx, president of the Center for Public Outreach in Vienna, Virginia, observed the Civitas Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho Partnership. He visited Civitas sites in Idaho April 7-8, 2010, Jordan April 18-21, and the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland April 25-30. He also reviewed reports and conducted interviews with Civitas leadership in Colombia.

Among Civitas programs offered in partner countries are *Project Citizen*, *Foundations of Democracy*, and *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*. Middle and high school student teams who are involved in *Project Citizen* identify community issues or problems, conduct research, develop solutions, including plans of action, and

formulate recommendations for public policy. In Ireland, *Project Citizen* is known as *Civic-Link*. There, the program also incorporates discussions of *community* and *identity* as well as *cross-border* or *cross-community* residential exchanges to help build bridges across longstanding religious and political divides.

"I've gained a great deal of appreciation for Project Citizen. The model has universal applications. It translates well for almost any part of the world. It's exciting to know that kids can use a process like this one to discuss common problems across cultures."

Idaho State Representative Brian Cronin

Observations

The following are highlights of evaluator observations of the Civitas Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho Partnership. Expanded explanations and additional information are included in the full report.

- **Partnership Focus Themes.** "Focus themes" that serve as guides for the partnership include: civic involvement, community development, reconciliation, integration of a human rights framework, use of technology in education for democracy, and international knowledge, according to a report submitted to the Center for Civic Education.

- **Conflict Zones, Peace and Reconciliation.** The partnership's international sites all exist in or near conflict zones. An underlying theme for their civic education efforts is peace and reconciliation. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are emerging from historic religious and political "Troubles." Jordan, located in the Middle East, hosts nearly two million Palestinian refugees. Colombia has endured guerilla attacks, paramilitary groups, illicit drug trafficking, and cross-border disputes.



Jordanian Students Find Their Voices

A *Project Citizen* team from the all-girl Al Thira Secondary School in Jordan took on the issue of children drowning in irrigation ponds. These young Bedouin women presented their case at a heavily-attended special conference in their desert community south of the Dead Sea. After heated discussion, Governor Samih Abeisat of Southern Aghwar District declared that he would appoint a commission to pursue their recommendations. He told the evaluator, "All citizens, not just students, need *Project Citizen*."

- **Likelihood to Be Involved in Identifying and Solving Community Problems.** The evaluator asked students whether, because of their Civitas experience, they were *more likely* or *less likely* to be involved in identifying and dealing with community issues and problems throughout their lives. An alternative choice was that the experience would *make no difference*. Fully 100 percent of students who were asked said they would be *more likely to be involved*.

- **Benefits for Students and Communities/Impact and Impressions:** Students, teachers, principals, parents, and others in the community at all sites are generally enthusiastic about the Civitas program. For example, *students* believe the program has increased their communication and teamwork skills, their confidence in becoming more active and engaged citizens, and their ability to overcome stereotypes and discover what they have in common with people across religions and jurisdictional borders. *Teachers and principals* noted that the program has encouraged active learning, brought even greater life to their schools, and improved connections with ideas, issues, individuals, and community. *Parents* praised the program for helping their children discover their talents, develop their ability to identify and solve problems, and enhance their confidence.

“These are kids who often come from working class backgrounds. We’re not trying to construct attitudes but define them. We would like to see all students have the Civic-Link experience. Our hope is that every student who comes to this school will discover himself. Civic-Link is helping.”

Principal Andy McMorran, **Ashfield Boys’ High School, Belfast, Northern Ireland**

- **Issues Identified and Addressed by Civitas Students.** Civitas students who met with the evaluator and presented project portfolios were asked to identify issues in their communities. All responded readily and with enthusiasm, reflecting their awareness of community needs and a sense of how they were internalizing civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Among the many issues identified by students were: conflicts between religions and cultures; school, family, and other forms of violence; relationships with police; the need for public transportation; wheelchair access; the need for youth centers and computer-training opportunities; underage drinking and drug use; early pregnancy; adequate housing; discrimination; unemployment; the environment; graffiti; vandalism; reducing litter; dangerous construction sites; fighting; bullying in schools; attacks on the elderly; aggressive driving and car accidents; water shortages; safety problems caused by unprotected irrigation ponds; the impact of technology on students; attracting qualified people for leadership positions; empowerment of women; cultural traditions with impact on their lives; development of the school environment; and the need for world-class education for all, including refugees, to prepare students to shape the future of their democracies. Several of these issues became central to student Civitas projects.

- **Types of Schools.** In Jordan, generally after grade four, students are separated into boys’ schools and girls’ schools. Among them are private and public (government) schools and UN schools, primarily serving Palestinian refugees. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland also have a variety of schools, such as all girls, all boys; Catholic, Protestant, integrated; and public, private. In Idaho, the evaluator visited a public school, a parochial school, and a charter school.

- **Organization and Leadership.** Partner organizations are well organized and benefit from seasoned leaders who exhibit a high level of professionalism. All are impacted by a lack of sufficient funding to fully accomplish everything they would like to do and spend significant time fundraising and applying for grants. Some members of the partnership sense that the role of lead partner needs to be more clearly defined to include greater communication and facilitation on behalf of partners rather than on their particular organizational focus. Partners expressed appreciation for the leadership of the Center for Civic Education and would like opportunities for even more frequent communication.

- **Strategic Communication.** Program leaders sensed a need for greater strategic communication to demonstrate that the program is mutually beneficial for schools and students as well as for communities and countries. Some educators, students, and members of the community would like to see the program become “the thing to do” for all young people, since its results are vitally important to the future. Partners generally expressed interest in becoming Civitas regional or issue-related centers.



Meeting with Bertie Ahern

Co-operation Ireland’s Marianne McGill at a meeting with former Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland Bertie Ahern during a 2010 Civitas external evaluation visit. Ahern was a key leader in forging the Good Friday Agreement leading to an end to armed conflict on the island. *Civic-Link*, based on *Project Citizen*, was created in 1999 after a meeting involving then U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, McGill, and CCE’s Executive Director Chuck Quigley. “Once young people get involved in *Civic-Link*,” Ahern said, “they are able to get beyond what seems to divide them and conceive of a shared future. That’s a good notion.”

- **Program Adaptations, Public Policy:** Civitas programs such as *Project Citizen* are often adapted to ensure that they meet the particular needs of a country. Often, those adaptations focus on language, culture, history, or the need to overcome conflict and discover common purpose. In the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, for a variety of reasons, “public policy” is not a generally familiar term. Co-operation Ireland senses a deep need to address that concern by using modified terminology or by making subtle but important changes in that segment of the methodology as a way to build better understanding of public policy.

- **Program Adaptations, Human Rights:** A human rights framework for *Project Citizen* has been developed by the Idaho Human Rights Education Center (IHREC) and is being presented to members of the partnership and others as the way to incorporate thinking about the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* into the process. International organizations involved in the partnership have significant experience with human rights issues, and some have expressed concerns about applying one framework at all sites. Rather than a single framework, CCE has noted possible use of a more adaptable “human rights lens” or “a human rights approach to *Project Citizen*.”

- **Research:** Both observations and other research indicate that those students who are involved in Civitas programs are increasing their civic knowledge, skills, behaviors, and dispositions. For example, Idaho conducted a recent round of research on effectiveness of a human rights framework for *Project Citizen*, based on observations and interviews in the Balkans. Co-operation Ireland, in a recent study,

noted benefits of *Civic-Link* for students, such as a sense of empowerment that resulted from active involvement in the community. Research and evaluation are essential components of the Civitas program.

- **Showcases:** National, regional, and/or local showcases are basic to *Project Citizen* and *Civic-Link*. However, because of cutbacks in funding, showcases have been discontinued in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. These events are held in Jordan, where the Ministry of Education provides certificates and some additional in-kind support, as well as in Colombia and Idaho.

- **Delegate Exchanges:** Idaho has conducted delegate exchanges separately with Ireland, Jordan, and Colombia. Some of those visits are defined as gatekeeper exchanges and some as teacher or student exchanges. Those who have participated are generally enthusiastic about the experience. Further attention might be focused on planning, timing, breadth and depth of inclusion, and follow-up activities aimed at sharing experiences and value.

- **Technology:** The partnership and its members have excelled in development of various technologies to support the Civitas program, and all have web sites. Ireland has created a sophisticated interactive program for students called *Train Station*. Jordan has worked with Idaho in developing a digital version of *Project Citizen*. Idaho offers lesson plans online. Virtual exchanges have been considered. Challenges range from bandwidth and variations in time zones to rules governing synchronous (interactive) online student communication.

- **Preparation and Training:** Excellent relationships have been developed with colleges and universities that prepare educators. However, in some cases, a lack of sufficient funding has led to interruption in what have proven to be effective preparation programs. Professional development/in-service training and follow-up to that training are generally offered by highly experienced professionals. In-country and multi-country conferences enhance training and provide a forum for sharing ideas and best practices. Teachers, coordinators, principals, and others would like to see an expansion of that training to prepare more educators for the program and upgrade the skills of those already involved.



Queen Rania Award winning teacher Sabah Al Nawaiseh shares her students' projects with JCCES Executive Director Mona Al Alami. JCCES Trainer Mustafa Mohsen observes, "*Project Citizen* tends to change the environment of the school. It connects the teachers with both the school and society. Civic education is helping to change teaching and learning."

- **Student Projects and Transition Year:** Student projects are either required or optional for graduation in some partner countries. Ireland, for example, includes in its schools a "Transition Year," when students can be involved in community projects to help prepare them for civic life. Both situations offer opportunities for students to become engaged in civic education programs such as *Project Citizen* and *Civic-Link*.

- **Expansion of the Program/Making it Mandatory:** Frequently, students, educators, and members of the community express hope that Civitas programs will be offered to even more students. Many recommend that they become a mandatory part of the curriculum or at least expanded to meet a growing demand for participation.

- **Sensitivity about U.S. Programs:** Sensitivity is sometimes expressed about programs developed and delivered by U.S.-based organizations. Ongoing communication to explain adaptations of these programs to localize them for each country or community helps to allay these concerns.

- **Extensions of *Project Citizen*:** Partners have made creative use of the *Project Citizen* methodology in addressing broad community needs. In Jordan, for example, an *Emerging Leaders Project* targets 18-30 year olds who are offered leadership training--and then apply what they have learned to initiate significant community improvement projects.

- ***Project Citizen* Student Community/Alumni Association:** *Project Citizen* and *Civic-Link* students would like to maintain communication with each other and with their counterparts around the world who are or have been engaged in the program. Some of those students, along with educators and parents, expressed support for the idea of a Civitas Alumni Association.

- **Recent Recognition:** Some *Project Citizen* teachers have been among those chosen to receive the coveted Queen Rania Award for their project-based approach to education in Jordan. *Civic-Link* students are among those who are being considered for membership on a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. *Project Citizen* was recently selected as one of the top five citizenship education programs in Colombia.

Further Observation, Best Practices, Civitas Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho Partnership
 While this partnership has many strengths, some of its programs and activities are exemplary. Based on overall observations, the following might be considered some of the partners' and partnerships' "best practices": Working in Conflict Zones, Peace and Reconciliation. Giving Students a Voice. Helping Students Find Common Ground Despite Conflicts in Society. Building Programs for Pre-Service and In-Service Training. Developing Technologies to Enhance Program Reach and Effectiveness.

“In the face of young people, politicians need to be more accountable. We are not just educating kids, but we are educating future politicians, future public officials, and future citizens. Children will be hard to stop in the future because they are learning how to identify and solve problems and perhaps make the system work. Civic-Link is at least a part of the answer. ”

Northern Ireland Community Relations Council CEO Duncan Morrow

Recommendations/Considerations

Considering strengths and needs of the Civitas Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho Partnership, the external on-site evaluator offers the following recommendations for consideration by individual partners, the partnership, and the Center for Civic Education in their ongoing quest for continuous improvement in an already highly effective program. More complete explanations are found in the full evaluation report.

- Present Civitas programs as part of a key strategy for education reform.
- Formulate a system to coalesce partners who function in conflict zones or have front-line experience in addressing issues involving peace and reconciliation.
- Encourage adaptability of Civitas programs to meet on-the-ground needs.
- Offer human rights as a crucial concept to be considered and incorporated rather than as a framework to be adopted.
- Continue advancements in Civitas-related technologies.
- Develop strategies to meet a growing demand for participation in Civitas programs.
- Consider specifically how the Irish Civitas program might be expanded to meet growing demand.
- Restore showcases in Ireland.
- Offer continuous professional development opportunities for partnership leaders.
- Consider ways to regularly address civic education issues involving immigration, refugees, displaced persons, and marginalized groups.
- Maintain lines of communication to constantly reinforce the local nature of Civitas programs.
- Celebrate the contributions of partnerships, schools, educators, students, and those who provide support for the program.
- Discuss methods for selecting students to participate in Civitas programs.
- Consider development of a Student Issue Forum that would annually report to top elected leaders and the public.
- Develop Civitas materials and workshops, including a template for a campaign, to promote corporate citizenship and social responsibility.
- Expect regular statistical and anecdotal reports on partner and partnership progress.
- Develop a Civitas Alumni Association.

The Partnership

While the Civitas Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho Partnership is relatively new, most of its members have been involved in the program for many years. Jordan and Ireland began their relationships with Civitas in 1999--Colombia in 1997-98. Idaho and Ireland began this particular Civitas partnership in 2005-06 and were joined by Colombia and Jordan in 2008. The partnership brings together the Idaho Human Rights Education Center (IHREC), with offices in Boise, led by Dan Prinzing; Co-operation Ireland, with offices in Dublin and Belfast, led by Marianne McGill; the Jordanian Center for Civic Education Studies (JCCES), with offices in Amman, led by Mona Al Alami; and Fundación Presencia, with offices in Bogotá, Colombia, led by Susana Restrepo. IHREC serves as managing partner.

During 2009-10, JCCES reported that 27 Jordanian schools and 27 teachers were engaged in delivering Civitas programs to 1,052 students. In the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, Co-operation Ireland noted that *Civic-Link* programs were active in 32 administrative regions, with 49 schools or youth clubs, 77 teachers/leaders, and 808 students directly involved. Fundación Presencia in Colombia reported that 6,234 students, 64 teachers, and 25 schools were involved in Civitas. In Idaho, IHREC estimated that 8,000 of its students had been involved between 2004 and 2010.

“What’s exciting and powerful about Project Citizen is its generational impact. Each year, a new set of students is involved. They share their experiences with parents and get connected to their communities across Idaho, including rural areas. All students should be involved in the program. What we want for our own children, we should want for all children.”

Idaho Department of Education Deputy Superintendent Rob Sauer, Boise, Idaho

General Purposes of the External, On-Site Evaluation

Through on-site observations, interviews, and authentication, Civitas external on-site evaluations strive to: confirm the validity of reports devoted to quantitative and qualitative information; provide an opportunity for students to spontaneously demonstrate their civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions or attitudes; confer with students, teachers, principals, other administrators, parents, and various representatives of government and the community to directly discuss the program’s benefits, from their experiences and points of view, and to collect their insights on how it might be improved; meet with students to hear selected project “Portfolio Presentations” devoted to a variety of issues they have identified; experience or view the reality of some actual problems students are addressing; determine, to the extent possible, the impact student projects have made on public policy through the practice of inclusive democratic methods; hear stories that confirm the successes or needs of the program; gain insights of the program’s directors through individual interviews; and offer observations and recommendations. The narrative of this report reflects activities, findings, and observations consistent with these purposes. *This 2010 external on-site evaluation focuses not only on each member of the Civitas Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho Partnership, but also on the partnership itself.*



Project Citizen students from Um Hamat Secondary School and Mu-Tah Elementary in the south of Jordan took on issues such as school and domestic violence and violence against women.



At Grosvenor Grammar School in Belfast, Northern Ireland, *Civic-Link* students addressed an issue they defined as attacks on the elderly. Aims included peace of mind, security, and adequate policing.



A Youth LEAD exchange to Jordan led these *Project Citizen* students in Boise, Idaho, to call for a new course, “Active Citizenship in the 21st Century” at Centennial High School. The request was approved.

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Note: Even more complete information on the 2010 Ireland-Jordan-Colombia-Idaho External Evaluation is included in a full report, also developed by Civitas External On-Site Evaluator Gary Marx, President of the Center for Public Outreach in Vienna, Virginia.