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Abstract

Theorists such as Gumpert (2000) suggest that different conceptions of higher education may have important consequences for students and society. We explore this possibility by considering a specific research question: Do students who attend for-profit post-secondary schools show lower levels of civic engagement than students who attend non-profit community colleges, either at the beginning of their study or two years later? Using longitudinal data from the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) National Post-secondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS90) and Beginning Post-secondary Survey (BPS), we test the hypothesis that students who attend for-profit, post-secondary vocational schools will show lower levels of civic engagement on several measures than similar students in community colleges. Students attending the two types of schools are alike in their levels of civic engagement at the beginning of their post-secondary education, but different four years later. We consider whether observed differences in civic behavior are due to variations in who attends the different types of schools or to identifiable experiences students may have in their programs, such as interactions with faculty or other students. The effect of proprietary school

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attendance on seven out of the ten different types of civic engagement measured here appears to be direct, rather than being mediated by measurable educational experiences. We reflect further on processes that might explain the differences and consider the policy implications of these findings for educational decision-makers. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Hodges Persell, Caroline, E-Mail: caroline.persell@nyu.edu