

# **The Deliberative Referendum: Learning Democracy by Doing**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports on a project-based transdisciplinary course entitled ‘Deliberative Referendums’, taught for the first time at Jacobs University Bremen, Germany, in spring 2010. It shows how political theory, research methods, and civic engagement can be fruitfully combined. The novel course format allowed students to practice *and* study democracy at the same time. Concretely, students organized a Deliberation Day on campus and then analyzed the results. As predicted in the literature, the deliberative experience significantly increased the knowledge of the participants, resulted in opinion change, and stimulated engagement. Nor does it end here. Before Deliberation Day, the topic of community service by Jacobs University students had not been an issue, but now the students plan to organize a referendum on it. This combination of a Deliberation Day and a subsequent referendum, what we dub a ‘Deliberative Referendum’, is the kind of chain of democratic innovations recommended in the growing literature on deliberative institutional design.

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## Introduction

On May 9th, 2010, Jacobs University Bremen was the first university outside the USA to organize a Deliberation Day.<sup>2</sup> Jacobs University is a private research university in Bremen, Germany. Founded in 1999, it offers undergraduate, Masters, and PhD programs. Its students come from all over the world and the undergraduate students live in colleges on campus. Deliberation Day was organized by students in our project-based transdisciplinary course on 'Deliberative Referendums'. The experience, documented in this paper, shows how political theory, research methods, and civic engagement can be fruitfully combined. Morse et al. (2005: 326) make a compelling argument that 'the skills of deliberative democracy must be learned' and that 'higher education should contribute of these skills or civic competencies'. Our course was designed with that aim, enabling students to practice *and* study democracy at the same time.

The course on Deliberative Referendums was divided into two parts. The theory-based part familiarized students with the main issues in the literature on deliberative democracy and deliberative polling and consisted of regular classes. The second part of the course was devoted to the project. For Deliberation Day, students chose the topic in consultation with the instructors and the university leadership. Students were asked to do three things: 1) to organize, design, and administer two surveys (one before, one after deliberation), including sampling of participants; 2) to organize a Deliberation Day, including provision of relevant information, moderating, and quality control of the deliberative process; 3) to evaluate the outcomes in terms of knowledge gain and opinion change and to identify the factors that affect the impact of the deliberative process.

The idea(l) of deliberative democracy is at the forefront of political theory and has given new impetus to thinking about how to further democratize existing democracies. At first, deliberative democracy was mostly an abstract ideal with little empirical relevance. That has

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<sup>2</sup> In our use of the term 'Deliberation Day' is closer to Fishkin's Deliberative Poll than to the idea of a Deliberation Day that Bruce Ackerman and Fishkin (2004) promoted: a national civic holiday that Americans should spend deliberating.

changed through such innovations as planning bodies, consensus conferences, and citizen juries. Of particular interest is the 'Deliberative Poll' invented by Stanford professor James Fishkin.<sup>3</sup> By now, many Deliberative Polls have been organized all around the world, from the European Union to the USA and even China (He 2006). The polls have spanned a wide range of topics; from the integration of historically disadvantaged minorities (Bulgaria, 2002), to investments in urban infrastructure (China, 2005) and future energy use (Vermont, 2007). Deliberative Polls have become, in Jane Mansbridge's (2010) words, the 'gold standard'. At university-level, Carnegie Mellon has been the first to organize so-called 'Campus Conversations' but Jacobs University is, to the best of our knowledge, the only university in Europe to have experimented with something similar.<sup>4</sup>

Deliberative Polls are conducted to address a seminal challenge of democracy: that citizens are often uninformed about key public issues (Fishkin 2009). The public lacks time, interest and other resources to inform itself fully about issues it may be asked to vote on. Deliberative Polls are designed to discover what people would think if they had access to balanced information and expert opinion and could deliberate in a supportive environment with people of diverse backgrounds and opinions (Luskin et al. 2002). Typically, a Deliberative Poll has the following structure: a random and representative sample of a population is chosen to participate in the Deliberative Poll, participants are provided with a brochure containing balanced and vetted information about the issue prior to the event, and during Deliberation Day participants interact in moderated small groups as well as a large plenary session where they can question experts (Fishkin 2009). Before and after the event, participants are asked to fill in a questionnaire to gauge knowledge and opinions and establish background variables (age, education, etc.). To measure knowledge gain and opinion change, the results of the pre- and post-deliberation survey are compared. Opinion change is taken as evidence of participants acquiring a more informed opinion (Fishkin 2009). From Fishkin's Deliberative Poll, our Deliberative Referendum adopts the use of a pre- and post-deliberation surveys as well as a

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<sup>3</sup> More information on deliberative polls can be found on the website for the Center for Deliberative Democracy: <http://cdd.stanford.edu/>. 'Deliberative Poll' is a registered trade mark of James Fishkin.

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/dean/conversations/index.html>.

control group and the format of Deliberation Day. As with the Deliberative Poll, the outcome of deliberation in a Deliberative Referendum is not a vote or consensus, but an overview of opinions (aggregation). These opinions are then used as input for the referendum.

On Sunday May 9<sup>th</sup>, the university hosted its own Deliberation Day. The group of 20 randomly selected participants was broadly representative of the university's undergraduate student body. The aim of Deliberation Day was to inform the participants about the various aspects of student community service, to allow them to deliberate in small groups under the supervision of trained student moderators, and to ask questions to a panel of experts. The survey shows that overall the participants were happy with the information they received and the quality of deliberation. Three-quarters agreed that participation was a 'valuable experience' (nobody disagreed), almost all agreed that such events should be organized more often, and a clear majority said participation in Deliberation Day made them 'want to become more active in student affairs at Jacobs University'.

To measure the impact of deliberation on participants' opinions, students compared the results of the pre- and post-surveys they had designed and administered themselves. Deliberation should lead to more informed opinions. To measure its success, the students looked for an increase in knowledge of the participants and changes of opinion. A comparison of the answers before and after Deliberation Day confirmed the expectations from the literature: knowledge increased and opinions changed. Some of the changes were statistically significant, strong results in light of the small number of participants.

In the literature, there is concern about the aftermath of deliberative experiments. What happens after Deliberation Day? David Ryfe (2005: 61) has observed an 'evident reluctance to incorporate citizen deliberation more fully into policy making', indicating for him 'a structural ambivalence within deliberative democracy about the relationship between talk and action'. As a next step, students intend to organize a referendum. The university leadership has committed itself to taking the outcome seriously. It will be the first case of what we call a 'Deliberative Referendum' and a good example of the kind of sequence of democratic innovations advocated by the political theorist Graham Smith (2009).

In sum, the 'deliberative referendum' incorporates elements of the Citizens' Assembly in British Columbia, Canada (see Lang 2007), and James Fishkin's Deliberative Poll. In the Citizens' Assembly, a group of 160 randomly selected citizens from British Columbia met over a period of eleven months in 2004 to deliberate about electoral reform (Smith 2009). In the end, they voted on a recommendation for a new type of electoral system, which was then put to a classic yes-no referendum. The first referendum failed narrowly, the second referendum some years later failed more clearly. From the Citizens' Assembly, the deliberative referendum takes the idea that deliberation is consultative and the ultimate decision should be taken by all those concerned.

This paper serves two aims. The first aim is to examine the extent to which the aims and objectives of a successful Deliberative Poll, according to the criteria of James Fishkin, have been met by our own Deliberation Day. The second aim is to reflect on the way in which such a project-based course can help students to practice and study democracy at the same time, combining political theory, research methods, and civic engagement. The paper is organized as follows. After a brief description of Deliberation Day, it reviews the issue of sampling - crucial in establishing representativeness. The organizational and methodological part is followed by a presentation and discussion of the results, focusing on the experience of the participants, knowledge gain, and opinion change. The conclusion puts Deliberation Day at Jacobs University in a broader perspective and looks ahead.

## **Deliberation Day at Jacobs University**

The idea of Deliberative Polling, as described by James Fishkin, is 'to use social science in the service of democracy' (Fishkin 2009: 28). At the same time, the design of actual deliberation requires many practical decisions to be made. The Deliberative Polls organized around the world, despite their common core, vary greatly in their organizational details. To put Deliberation Day at Jacobs University in a comparative perspective, we will make reference not to an abstract model of Deliberation Day but rather to the variety of actual experiences.

The Deliberative Poll about 'The introduction of mandatory community service at Jacobs University Bremen' took place on campus on May 9, 2010. Although short, a single day of deliberation is by no means atypical. Generally speaking, Deliberative Polls last from one to two days. Of the polls listed by the Stanford-based Center for Deliberative Democracy, only the two largest polls, in terms of participants, lasted for an entire three days.<sup>5</sup> In order to facilitate participation, most Deliberative Polls take place on weekends. As final exams are traditionally written in the month of May, the event at Jacobs University was designed to last for one day only such as not to discourage potential participants. With regard to the little time available, the following schedule was agreed:

10:00-10:30 Opening Ceremony with University President

The opening ceremony served as an introduction. To motivate participants and communicate the importance of the event, Jacobs University Bremen's President, Prof. Dr. Joachim Treusch, welcomed and thanked all participants for dedicating their time to the project.

10:30-10:45 Breakfast

Breakfast was intended for socializing and part of a larger incentives package including the provision with food to all participants for the entire day. A similar method was employed in the Burlington Poll, in which incentives included 'an all-expenses paid weekend in a good hotel, and an honorarium of \$150' (Luskin et al. 2007: 8).

10:45-11:45 Group discussion session I

The size of small groups in Deliberative Polls varies, as does the number of overall participants, but normally small groups include between 5 and 15 participants. With the 20 participants at Jacobs University Bremen, two groups of ten were formed. This was thought to allow for ample opportunity to speak out and get a true discussion going. The first group session served as an

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<sup>5</sup> The Deliberative Polls in Michigan and Brussels hosted 314 and 348 participants, respectively. Although a Poll which took place in Torino, Italy for two days in early 2007 was designed for 340 participants, no documentation is available to prove this number. Other forms of deliberation may last for significantly longer periods. The Citizen's Assembly on electoral reform in British Columbia lasted for a period of ten months.

introduction: the moderators introduced themselves, explained the participants' and the moderators' respective roles in the process of deliberation, and revealed to the participants what would be expected from them in the course of the day. This was followed by a 15-minute period during which the participants were asked to come up with their individual associations with the term 'community service'. Rather than discussing with the aim of finding a common definition, this round aimed at showing the participants that their opinion was in fact appreciated and demonstrating to them the open character of deliberation. Also, participants were invited to exchange their own experiences, if any, with community service. After considering the pros and cons of community service the groups deliberated on those fields in which they still required information and agreed on a set of questions to be asked to the expert panel. These questions were the outcome of the first group session.

#### 11:45-12:00 Coffee break

Besides giving a short but necessary break to everybody, these intermissions allowed participants continue their exchanges outside of the formal session.

#### 12:00-13:30 Discussion with expert panel

The expert discussion is an essential part in the formation of an informed opinion. The experts answered to the questions previously agreed on in the small group discussions. As Fishkin points out, the questions asked to the panelists should not be mere questions of fact, but rather be about the consequences and costs, as well as possible tradeoffs involved in the issue at hand. Therefore, the expert panel itself should be balanced in its views, perspectives and areas of expertise (Fishkin & Luskin 2005). The number of invited experts varies, we invited four experts:

- A representative from the local Agency for Voluntary Service;
- The vice-president of Jacobs University in charge of administration and student affairs;
- An undergraduate student at Jacobs University with experience of mandatory community service;

- A professor of gerontology from a regional university with a research focus on social work.

The session started with each of the experts introducing themselves. Afterwards the student moderators opened the floor for questions systematically working through the list of categories generated in the small group sessions that morning. Questions concerned practical matters as well as more fundamental issues about the appropriateness of mandatory community service by students. Interestingly, all experts were cautious about mandatory student community service, albeit for different reasons.

#### 13:30-14:30 Lunch break

The lunch break, similar to breakfast in the morning, was part of the incentives package and served to keep the group together. Whereas most of the participants would have eaten in the university's canteen, pizza and ice-cream were ordered for all participants. As in the previous breaks, further ideas and questions were exchanged among the participants.

#### 14:30-16:00 Group discussion session II

In the second small group discussion, participants continued the process of deliberation. The final deliberations of the day took on a more concrete character. After a short reflection of what the participants had just learned from the experts, e.g. whether there had been any surprises or unexpected opinions, the participants were asked to discuss specific issues, such as the merits and demerits of mandatory versus voluntary service and the potential forms of community service apt for students at Jacobs University Bremen. Since there was no vote or requirement to reach consensus, the deliberations were conducted without any pressure to come to a conclusion.

#### 16:00-16:15 Closing ceremony

In the closing ceremony, once again all participants were thanked for their efforts. In order to enhance the rate of participation, there were two incentives for all participants. Every participant received €20 in cash for her participation during Deliberation Day. In addition, there was a raffle at the end of Deliberation Day in which every participant stood a chance of winning

an iPod Nano worth approximately €140. Those polls for which documentation on incentives is available featured stronger incentives, such as €80-120 (Turin), \$200 (California), or a weekend in a good hotel plus \$150 (Vermont). However, these polls required more time and effort from participants, so that the incentives provided in at Jacobs University Bremen seem adequate in proportion to the time and effort participants were required to invest.

In sum, Deliberation Day consisted of eight distinct parts (opening ceremony; breakfast; first group session; coffee break; expert session; lunch break; second group session; closing ceremony). Each part served a particular purpose, although the most important elements in this democratic experiment were arguably the small group deliberations and the expert session. The general aim of Deliberation Day was not so much oriented towards any specific outcome, but rather towards assuring a qualitatively valuable process of deliberation.

## Sampling

The majority of the literature on deliberative democracy attributes great importance to the representativeness of those selected to participate in a Deliberative Poll. The importance of a representative sample lies in the assumption that a group of 'ordinary citizens' is necessary in order to create a 'microcosmic deliberation' (Fishkin 2009: 81) whose outcome can be considered representative of the entire population. That way Fishkin's (2009) measurement of political equality is achieved as long as votes are counted equally at the end of deliberation. Notwithstanding, in most practical applications of the deliberative theory the literature omits detailed documentation of the sampling procedure and an analysis of its representativeness. Following the example of Andersen & Hansen (2007) this section gives an overview about the different samples and compares them to the overall population – a mismatch between the deliberating microcosm and the mass population poses the greatest challenge to the representativeness of the sample (Fishkin 2009: 83).

The objective of our sampling procedure was to obtain a representative sample of enrolled Jacobs University undergraduate students in terms of three main characteristics: gender,

nationality, and school affiliation – to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) and the School of Engineering and Sciences (SES). Concern about a possible low turn-out motivated the decision to have a random sample of 60 students with the aim of having 30 students attend Deliberation Day. In order to compare and analyze the results of Deliberation Day, an additional random sample of 120 students was generated for the Control Group. The Control Group is a crucial analytical tool as it allows for a comparative perspective on the opinion and knowledge gain during deliberation (Andersen & Hansen 2007). While the sampled Prospective Participants Group was asked to accept or decline the invitation to Deliberation Day on top of filling out the original survey, Prospective Control Group members were only asked to fill out the survey.

**Table 1: Different groups in the study**

Group Name	Date of sampling	Number of Participants (N)
Overall Population	1 <sup>st</sup> April, 2010	680
Prospective Participants Group	18 <sup>th</sup> April, 2010	60
Participants Group	9 <sup>th</sup> May, 2010	20
Prospective Control Group	25 <sup>th</sup> April, 2010	120
Control Group	8 <sup>th</sup> May, 2010	51

As a result of the sampling procedure four groups can be analyzed in terms of representativeness as compared to the overall population. The Overall Population (N=680) is composed of all enrolled undergraduate students on campus of Jacobs University Bremen. The Prospective Participants Group is a random sample (N=60) of the overall population. The Participants Group is the group of students accepting the invitation and participating in Deliberation Day (N=20). Its reduced number as compared to the Prospective Participants Group arises from numerous non-responses, declined invitations and no-shows. The Prospective Control Group is a random sample (N=120) of the overall population. The Control Group is composed of the Prospective Control Group students that participated in the survey (N=51). Both the Prospective Control Group and the Prospective Participants Group were

contacted one week before Deliberation Day. Both groups received customized e-mails inviting them to participate. Using the EFS Survey software, it was possible to contact each participant of the two groups at virtually the same time. The messages to both groups included a formal invitation, an explanation about what Deliberation Day was all about, as well as a customized link to the pre-deliberative survey. In addition, the messages included a list of incentives and more information about technicalities such as the schedule of Deliberation Day.

### *Sampling Procedure*

Using the Mathematica for Students software, students generated a random sample from the Overall Population (N=680): all undergraduate students currently enrolled at Jacobs University, disregarding the 21 students registered for the course Deliberative Referendums. The result was a truly random sample (N=60, see Table 2). The next task was to invite the participants on the random sample list. Invitations were expanded to all 60 participants in the hope of achieving a satisfactory turn-out. Consequently, the Participants Group (N=20) is what can be considered a self-selection sample within the random sample of 60 students. The Prospective Control Group (N=120) was again generated with Mathematica for Students software, this time excluding both the 21 registered students from our class and the sample of the Prospective Participants Group. The Control Group comprising students participating in the survey (N=51) can again be considered a self-selection sample within the random sample of the Prospective Control Group.

### *Sample Analysis*

Despite our efforts to avoid self-selection through an incentive-based structure designed to attract students regardless of school, sex and nationality, the comparative analysis reveals certain differences between the different groups. While most evaluations of Deliberative Polls report characteristics of their participants, they do not discuss representativeness to a large degree (Luskin et al. 2007). This is vital to consider in relation to Smith's criteria (2009) of inclusiveness especially when Deliberative Polls are evaluated. A comparative summary of characteristics between the groups is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Characteristics of the four different groups under analysis compared to the overall population**

Characteristic	Overall Population <sup>1</sup>	Prospective Participants Group	Participants Group	Prospective Control Group	Control Group
SEX					
Male	53%	53%	40%	59%	49%
Female	47%	47%	60%	41%	51%
SCHOOL					
SES <sup>2</sup>	66%	62% <sup>3</sup>	30%	74%	75%
SHSS <sup>2</sup>	34%	37% <sup>3</sup>	70%	26%	24%
NATIONALITY					
German	24%	28%	40%	18%	20%
Romanian	15%	12%	10%	19%	22%
Bulgarian	8%	12%	15%	8%	8%
Others	53%	52%	35%	55%	50%
N	680	60	20	120	51

<sup>1</sup> Overall Population: number of enrolled undergraduate students at Jacobs University 2009/2010.

<sup>2</sup> SES: School of Engineering and Sciences. SHSS: School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Students enrolled in the study programs International Management and Engineering were all listed as SES students.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages of school affiliation for the Prospective Participants Group and the Control Group do not add up to 100% as a result of missing data for individual students.

Based on this analysis we also conducted a number of Chi-Square tests in order to compare both the Participants Group and the Control Group with the Overall Population for representativeness (not shown here). Whereas the composition of the groups with respect to gender and nationality was relatively unproblematic, we found a difference between the Participants Group and the Overall Population with respect to school affiliation: There was an overrepresentation of SHSS students which was statistically significant. This self-selection bias was most likely due to the fact that students from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences are perhaps more interested in such democratic innovations. On the whole, the participants group is not fully representative - it is, however, difficult to expect a truly representative sample of 20 students out of a population of 680. Moreover, it might be that the participants differ in other characteristics from the overall population that are not examined here.

## Results

Balanced information, provided through written material and access to diverse expert opinions, are expected to increase the knowledge of participants and potentially change their opinions. Another source for opinion change comes from deliberation itself, as participants convene in small groups, in which they are confronted with a range of opinions and perspectives and engage in an open and respectful exchange of arguments under the supervision of trained moderators. As Fishkin (2009) claims, information and deliberation should lead to more informed decisions. Knowledge gain and opinion change are indicators of this desirable outcome. Unfortunately, the set-up of our deliberative referendum does not allow us to differentiate between the effects of information and deliberation. We will, therefore, summarize them with the term deliberative process.

### Knowledge Gain

By engaging in the deliberative process, the participants of a Deliberative Poll should gain knowledge about the particular topic and become aware of the merits and demerits of specific proposals. The educational effect of a Deliberative Poll is at the heart of the whole concept: to create more educated citizens who are able to make considered decisions (Fishkin 2009). In other words, an opinion change during the deliberative process is expected to emerge from knowledge gain. The increase in knowledge and awareness is supposed to come both from the information booklet that the participants are provided with prior to the deliberation and from the deliberation itself (Andersen & Hansen 2007). Fishkin's criteria of substantive balance and information play an important role here. All information should be accurate, relevant and balanced, so that the participants themselves may decide on their merits (Fishkin 2009).

Fishkin reports that participants 'always become significantly more informed' and items measuring their information level 'routinely show statistically significant gains [...] and sometimes the changes are large' (Fishkin 2009: 121). During our deliberative referendum, the participants were provided with relevant and balanced information in a similar way as in

Fishkin’s Deliberative Polls. They received a booklet prior to Deliberation Day, which contained pertinent information on the topic and covered the topic from different angles. During Deliberation Day, the participants listened to the opinion of experts, could ask them follow-up questions, and then discussed the topic among themselves in small group sessions. Even though it was quite difficult to draft adequate knowledge questions for mandatory community service, we expected a knowledge gain comparable to what Fishkin (2009) reports.

To evaluate the knowledge gain of the participants, we asked them one question in which they themselves could assess the level of knowledge they have about the topic (self-reported knowledge level). The answers showed that the participants themselves felt that they had learned a great deal about the topic. While the mean answer before deliberation was 2.7, this increased to 3.4 after deliberation on a 5-point scale, indicating a statistically significant change on a 1% level. Before deliberation half of the people (50%) reported that they had ‘some but not sufficient knowledge’ about the topic. After Deliberation Day, 85% of the participants felt that they had ‘just about right’ or ‘very much’ knowledge about the discussed topic.

**Table 3: Self-reported knowledge level**

	Before Deliberation	After Deliberation	Control Group
Mean	2.70	3.40*	2.63
N	20	20	51

*\* Difference in means between the answers of the participants before and after deliberation is statistically significant on 1% level (two-tailed test).*

Interestingly, there were two participants in the whole group who indicated lower level of knowledge (i.e. ‘just about right’) after the deliberation than before (i.e. ‘all necessary knowledge’). It is likely that both participants overestimated their knowledge about the topic before the deliberation, and afterwards reported their knowledge level more realistically.

Besides self-reporting on their knowledge level, the participants were asked to answer seven additional knowledge questions about mandatory community service at Jacobs University. The majority of participants could answer more than half of the questions correctly even before deliberation. The knowledge gain is then of course limited for these questions. However, for

two questions (Q4 and Q7) where the majority of participants answered incorrectly before deliberation, the knowledge gain is significant. For both questions the percentage of correct answers increased more than two-fold, a similar gain to the one achieved in Deliberative Polls conducted by Fishkin (2009).

**Table 4: Level of knowledge: Percentage of participants giving correct answers (correct answers in bold)**

	Before Deliberation (N=20)	After Deliberation (N=20)	Control Group (n=51)
2. Community service: <b>is unpaid service for the benefit of others</b>	70	85	92*
3. Which of the following countries have some form of mandatory service? <b>Germany</b>	75	80	66
4. Jacobs University will be the only university in Germany offering mandatory community service. <b>TRUE</b>	40	85**	38
5. German Public Universities have mandatory community service. <b>FALSE</b>	85	100	76
6. Jacobs University offers recognition for 'extracurricular activities' through a separate transcript. <b>TRUE</b>	85	95	92
7. What is the current (approximate) population of undergraduate students at Jacobs University? <b>680</b>	30	70**	38

\* The difference in correct answers of the participants before deliberation and the control group is statistically significant on 5% level (two-tailed test).

\*\* The difference in correct answers of the participants before and after deliberation is statistically significant on 5% level (two-tailed test).

As with the self-reported knowledge level, the percentage of correct answers achieved by the control group resembled the ones achieved by the participants, so at least for the knowledge part the participants were a good representation of the bigger population (see Table 4).

The results in the aftermath of Deliberation Day on the issue of mandatory community service clearly confirmed the educational effect of information and deliberation. By reading the information booklet, participating in small group discussions and listening to the opinions of experts, participants of the deliberative referendum collected relevant information and

important facts about the issue and gained more knowledge about the merits and demerits of mandatory community service and its possible implementation at Jacobs University.

## Opinion Change

Fishkin (2009) argues that more than two-thirds of all attitude items in a deliberative process result in net changes. Hence, we expect opinions stated after deliberation to be different from those obtained before. Participants of the deliberation on community service were asked to fill out a questionnaire which did not only assess their knowledge, but focused on opinions about community related work before and after the process of deliberation.

Opinion change as an outcome of a deliberative process can be assessed at the individual level (when a participant changes an opinion) and/or the aggregate level (when there is a net opinion change in the group). Following Luskin et al. (2002), we focus on change at the aggregate level, where it should be easier to identify and interpret opinion change and its causes. Still, to interpret the aggregate results it is sometimes useful to look at disaggregated data, so we will pursue both tracks.

### *Attitudes towards community service in general*

The questionnaire began with questions about attitudes towards community service in general. Participants had to indicate their position on a 5-point Likert scale. A higher score on the scale indicates a positive response to a question, whereas a lower score indicates a negative answer. The mean scores before and after deliberation and net changes are depicted in Table 5. As before, the table also includes the randomly selected control group for comparison, increasing our confidence that opinion changes stem from the deliberative process.

**Table 5: Attitudes towards community service in general**

Questions	Mean before deliberation	Mean after deliberation	Net Change	Mean control group
In general, to what extent are you in favor of community service? <i>(1=Not at all; 2=Somewhat not in favor; 3=Neither in favor, nor against; 4=Somewhat in favor; 5=Very much in favor)</i>	3.90	4.40	+ 0.50*	4.00
Would you like to be involved in community service during your time at Jacobs University? <i>(1=Not at all; 2=Maybe not; 3=I don't know; 4=Maybe yes; 5=Definitely yes)</i>	3.75	4.20	+ 0.45	3.73
Do you think community service could have a positive effect on the university? <i>(1=Not at all; 2=Maybe not; 3=I don't know; 4=Maybe yes; 5=Definitely yes)</i>	4.25	4.50	+ 0.25	4.22
Do you think mandatory community service could have a positive effect on the neighborhood? <i>(1=Not at all; 2=Maybe not; 3=I don't know; 4=Maybe yes; 5=Definitely yes)</i>	4.10	4.05	- 0.05	3.47
Do you think mandatory community service could have a positive effect on you? <i>(1=Not at all; 2=Maybe not; 3=I don't know; 4=Maybe yes; 5=Definitely yes)</i>	3.75	4.35	+ 0.60**	3.47

*N (participants) = 20. N (control group) = 51.*

*\* Statistically significant at 10% level.*

*\*\* Statistically significant at 5% level.*

After participating in Deliberation Day, its participants became even more positive about community service: the means of four out of five questions changed in that direction. This result is all the more remarkable because the means were already very high before deliberation, limiting the possibilities for a shift in opinion to the upper bound. The first question about a general appreciation of community service revealed one of the largest changes with a 0.5 shift (1-to-5 scale) towards favoring community service. The change is statistically significant on the 10% level. In light of the small N (20 participants), such a level of significance is noteworthy. The mean after deliberation is high (4.40 on a 1-to-5 scale),

indicating that participants are, on average, very much in favor of community service. A closer look at the disaggregated data reveals a change in opinion among nine out of twenty participants.

On the question whether the participants would want to be involved in community service during their time at Jacobs University, we see that the willingness to get active in community service increased from 3.75 to 4.20 on a five-point scale, although the change of 0.45 is too small to be significant. We also observe only minor changes in the participants' view on the effects of community service on the university and the neighborhood. From the beginning, the group thought that these effects would be very positive (4.25 and 4.10 on a 1-to-5 scale).

We found the largest change in the question whether participants thought community service could have a positive effect on them. After the deliberative process, participants were much more likely to agree than before (3.75 to 4.35 on a 1-to-5 scale). The net change of 0.60 is statistically significant at the 5% level. Again, in light of the small number of participants, such a level of significance is remarkable. This opinion change is especially pronounced among those without any prior experience with community service.

In sum, participants were largely positive about community service and stayed that way during the deliberative process. 16 out of 20 participants indicated that they would like to get involved in community service, with three participants before and ten participants after the deliberation 'definitely' wanting to be active. The effects of community service were considered to be positive.

#### *Attitudes towards mandatory community service*

The second part of the questionnaire was concerned with the *mandatory* aspect of community service. Participants were asked to indicate whether they favored making community service mandatory at Jacobs University Bremen or not. They had to state their opinion on a 3-point scale, ranging from 1 (against mandatory community service) to 2 (against mandatory community service but in favor of voluntary community service) to 3 (support for mandatory community service). This question was also used as a filter: Those respondents stating they did

not support mandatory community service were later asked to elaborate on their reasons and to think about possible incentives to make mandatory community service more attractive. Those respondents in favor of the idea had the possibility to comment on organizational issues for implementing mandatory community service.

The mean score on the question ‘How do you feel about making community service mandatory for students at Jacobs University?’ did not change during our Deliberative Poll. However, a closer look at the disaggregated data reveals that before the deliberation, the majority of participants (thirteen out of twenty) was against the idea of making the service mandatory, but supported voluntary work. The number declined to ten after deliberation. In the control group that did not participate in the deliberative process, 71% were in favor of introducing a voluntary community service at the university, roughly equivalent to the result in the group of participants before deliberation (65%). We find much greater differences between participants and control group when looking at support for mandatory community service: Nine out of twenty participants were in favor of mandatory community service after deliberation compared to seven before deliberation. This illustrates one of our key findings: Nearly half of all the participants would be supportive of mandatory community service. In the control group only 19% supported this idea. These results allow for two conclusions. First, there seems to be a self-selection bias on the side of the participants, as the participants to deliberation day were already much more positive about mandatory community service to begin with. Second, even so, support for mandatory community service increased after deliberation, leading us to believe that the provision of balanced information and the experience of deliberation had an impact.

#### *Hurdles for mandatory community service*

We found that 65% of the participants before and 50% after deliberation were against mandatory service. What are the reasons behind this attitude? In addition to an open question, we asked the participants about three specific reasons. Table 6 presents the results, the changes are all statistically significant at the 5% level. After being exposed to information and deliberation, the mean scores indicate that most of the participants now disagree with the statement that mandatory community service is against the idea of volunteer work, that it puts

too much pressure on students, and that low German language skills hinders its effectiveness. For two of the three questions, the gap between the mean of the participants' group after deliberation and the mean of the control group is striking. We conclude that information and deliberation lead people to rethink some of their objections to mandatory community service.

**Table 6: Agreement with three specific reasons against mandatory community service**

Statement	Mean before deliberation	Mean after deliberation	Net change	Mean control group
Making community service mandatory is against the very idea of volunteer work. (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree, nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)	2.90	1.95	- 0.95**	3.10
Mandatory community service puts too much pressure on Jacobs University students. (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree, nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)	2.75	1.65	- 1.10**	2.90
Low proficiency in German language hinders effective community service. (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree, nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)	2.80	1.80	- 1.00**	2.10

\*\* Statistically significant at 5% level.

### *How to implement mandatory community service*

Nearly half of the participants of Deliberation Day supported the idea of mandatory community service. We were interested in their opinions on practical questions of implementation:

First, when should students do community service? Before deliberation, 20% of the participants believed that community service should be done at a specific time such as semester breaks. After deliberation, 34% agreed with that.

Second, how much time should students spend on community service? The majority of participants agreed that there should be a fixed number of hours. The average number of hours

for mandatory community service suggested before and after deliberation was around 90 per year and remained at similar levels, but the responses varied greatly.

Third, where should students do community service? Participants clearly favored off campus work in Bremen: All participants supporting mandatory service expressed their agreement with this idea. As we allowed for multiple answers, 40% before and 22% after deliberation were additionally in favor of off campus service in their home countries. Support for community service on campus dropped dramatically after deliberation. Although we can only speculate about the reasons for this change, one possibility might be the discussion in the expert session about the danger of community service replacing regular student jobs on campus.

Fourth, what kind of community service would students want to do? Childcare, working with disabled people and working in a retirement home were mentioned.

Sixth, how should community service be organized? Students emphasized the need for choice and strongly endorsed the idea of deciding themselves where they want to do community service. Before deliberation, a majority argued that students should apply themselves. This increased to 89% afterwards. 20% trusted the administration to take over the job and assign students, but this opinion was not shared by anyone after deliberation. Interestingly, support for the inclusion of students in the organization of community service declined after deliberation, suggesting that students made a distinction between the organizational part of community service, which they entrusted to Jacobs University's administration, and the active part of community service (the when and where), over which they like to have full control.

To sum up, those participants of Deliberation Day who favored mandatory community service had clear preferences about when to do community service (when they like), where (off campus), how much (90 hours per year), what kind of (child care and work with disabled persons) and they are emphatic about having the right to choose themselves how, when and where they want to do community service, supported by the university administration which should take care of organizational matters.

### *The relationship between knowledge gain and opinion change*

What is the relationship between knowledge gain and opinion change? We investigated that link by looking at opinion change and the level of knowledge after deliberation. According to Fishkin et al. (2010: 444), the latter is a better measure for true information gain than simply looking at the difference in knowledge before and after the deliberative process: First, participants answering questions correctly before deliberation cannot show any gain in knowledge afterwards (ceiling effect); secondly, knowledge questions asked are fairly easy compared to all the knowledge questions that do exist about this topic (item sampling bias); finally, there is a trend that participants who already have a lot of knowledge will also gain more during deliberation (cumulative effect; see also Luskin et al., 2002: 480).

Unfortunately, and despite their considerable magnitude, the individual-level correlations between opinion change and the level of knowledge after deliberation were statistically not significant. The strongest link between the two still showed in the question whether mandatory community service could have a positive effect on the participant ( $r=.35$ ). Moreover, there was a moderate relationship between the level of knowledge and opinion change on the question whether community service has a positive impact on the university ( $r=.28$ ). The other correlations were smaller and, of course, also not significant.

Why was that the case? As mentioned earlier, attitudes about community service in general, be it general support or the willingness to become involved, were already very positive before deliberation. This limits the possibility for a change in opinion, hence also for a correlation with knowledge gain. For example, half of all the participants were already 'very much in favor' or 'definitely' wanted to get involved in community service before deliberation, or only changed one point on the 1-to-5 point scale, such as from 'in favor' to 'very much in favor'. Nonetheless, the disaggregated results showed that those few participants who experienced quite a large shift in opinion were those who performed best in the knowledge questions, answering on average 12.6 out of 14 questions correctly.

We found the same pattern when evaluating the relationship between the level of knowledge after deliberation and an overall opinion change ( $r=.27$ ): those participants who changed their

opinion the most during deliberation were also performing best in the knowledge questions. Those eleven participants, who were able to answer either all questions correctly or made one mistake, changed their attitude on average on 3.3 out of 6 opinion questions. By contrast, those who did less well in the knowledge questions only changed their opinion on 2.5 questions on average.

Of course, we are careful about far-reaching conclusion for the whole Jacobs University student population, based on results of our sample of 20 participants. Nonetheless, we believe that our deliberate process illustrates how opinions can change if people become more informed on the issue at hand. Even with a fairly small sample size, a number of our results were statistically significant, including a positive net change of means towards increasingly favoring community service and community service having a positive effect on the participant. One of our key results: After deliberating, all participants of Deliberation Day were in favor of community service. Nine participants, almost half of the group, supported mandatory community service after deliberation. This number is higher than before the deliberative process. At the same time, those participants opposed to mandatory community service were less negative about it after deliberation.

## Activity Evaluation

### Moderators' Perspectives

According to James Fishkin (2009), the great majority of the population is underinformed about current political issues, often basing their political opinions and voting choices on spontaneous impressions rather than on a true comprehension of the issue. These shortcomings are addressed by democratic innovation such as a Deliberative Poll where balanced information and a respectful exchange of opinion are essential. One way of achieving a balance in the exchange of opinions is to employ moderators to chair debates as well as Q&A sessions with experts. For Deliberation Day at Jacobs University two moderator tandems, all students participating in our class, were selected on a voluntary basis. Although some moderators

already had experience with moderation in one way or another, we invited the whole class to participate in a professional two-day moderation training prior to Deliberation Day. During the small group sessions only one moderator directly chaired the discussion, while the other stayed in the background and kept track of the time.

Fishkin offers surprisingly little academic literature on the role moderators can and do play during deliberation – although we know from social psychology experiments that different moderation styles can have different effects on different people, thereby influencing the course and the outcome of deliberation (see Ryfe 2005 for an overview). Along similar lines, little attention is paid to possible small group dynamics (Schkade et. al. 2007). Having these effects in mind, we asked our own moderators how they perceived their own role during Deliberation Day and what kind of dynamics they could observe in their respective small group. Particular attention was given to the five criteria of a qualitative deliberation identified by Fishkin (2009: ch. 5): information, substantive balance, diversity, conscientiousness, equal consideration. In addition, the moderators were asked about their personal experience. On the whole, all four moderators were satisfied with the small group discussions and felt comfortable in their roles.

### *Information*

Fishkin's information criterion denotes the extent to which participants are given access to reasonably accurate information that they believe to be relevant to the issue and which helps them to form an informed opinion about the respective issue (Fishkin 2009: ch. 5). Participants of Deliberation Day were provided with a 9-page information booklet, informing them about the logic of and the reasons behind Deliberation Day, general facts about the topic of mandatory community service and advantages and disadvantages of introducing mandatory community service at Jacobs University. Even though all participants rated the usefulness of the brochure in the evaluation survey at the end, one moderator tandem had doubts about how many participants had actually read the information material. The other team said that it was very hard to judge whether participants actually read the brochure as there were not much empirical material included which could be quoted. Moreover, one of the moderators was

uncertain in how far he/she would have been allowed to give new information when the group did not know the answer to a particular question.

### *Substantive Balance*

Substantive balance is the extent to which arguments offered by one side are answered by considerations offered by those who hold other perspectives. By putting people in unusual situations where they are not only surrounded by like-minded people, participants are more likely to take arguments from opposing points of view seriously (Fishkin 2009: ch. 5). At the Jacobs Deliberation Day, one moderator tandem noticed group domination by two participants, whereas the other tandem claimed that in their group everyone talked about the same amount. Both tandems observed that while participants showed interest in other people's opinion, it was at times difficult for them to listen and not to interrupt the others.

### *Diversity*

Diversity captures the extent to which the major positions in the public are represented by participants in the discussions (Fishkin 2009: ch. 5). While it was difficult for both moderator tandems to assess the true representativeness of the participants since not all opinions existing among the whole student body are known<sup>6</sup>, they had the feeling that a diverse range of attitudes was represented in the discussions. Nevertheless, they also felt that those participating at Deliberation Day itself were generally more engaged and socially active than the average student at Jacobs University, pointing to a possible self-selection bias in the sampling process and hence, probably diminishing the true diversity of viewpoints in the overall undergraduate population. Moreover, students of the School of Engineering and Science were underrepresented (see sampling section). One problem might have been that the time slot of Deliberation Day was inconvenient, because some of these students had important assignments to complete.

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<sup>6</sup> There was a control group of students who did not participate at the deliberative referendum, but who filled out the same survey as the participants. While the results might give an impression of the range of opinions in the wider Jacobs community, moderators did not know the outcomes yet.

### *Conscientiousness*

Conscientiousness indicates the extent to which participants sincerely weigh the merits of arguments as opposed to weighing to acting strategically, or worse, attempting to disrupt the deliberation for others. Fishkin (2009) assumes most of the participants to be politically inactive and not having pre-formed, fixed opinions. Thus, he expects them to come to the deliberative poll with open minds, ready to change their opinions (Fishkin 2009: ch. 5). Both moderator tandems generally considered participants to be open-minded towards other opinions and observed opinion changes in their groups. However, one group had two dominating participants who seemed considerably opinionated before deliberation. These participants frequently based their arguments on personal experiences and insisted on their opinions. Of course, it is important not to base conclusions on the dominating participants who may have made their voices heard more often than other group members, but who by no means represent the whole group: In the other group, the moderator tandem saw the criteria of conscientiousness fulfilled to a greater extent as more participants brought up arguments for both sides in both sessions. This may have to do with the fact that there were no strong dominating participants wanting to push the discussion into a particular direction (for more information on group dynamics in small groups see Brewer 1999, Moscovici & Zavalloni 1969, or Asch 1955).

### *Equal Consideration*

Equal consideration implies the extent to which arguments offered by all participants are considered on the merits regardless of which participants offer them. A successful deliberative poll does not allow views to be devalued or others to dominate deliberation. Domination and/or polarization within the group should be avoided (Fishkin 2009: ch. 5). In our case, the two moderator tandems had different impressions on how successful they were in achieving equal consideration: one tandem observed group domination by two participants diminishing equal considerations, while the others saw everyone's arguments given about equal attention and consideration by the others. The first tandem had the feeling that those group members participating most had a social science major, while two people did not say anything at all

throughout the whole day. Looking at the participants' evaluations, however, we can see that in none of the groups did the participants disagree with the statement that the members of their small groups respected each others' views, pointing to the fact that deliberators perceived their group members to consider each other equally.

### *Potential Improvements and Outlook*

Even though both moderator tandems rated Deliberation Day as a success, they naturally had suggestions about how this first-time event could be improved in the future. All moderators felt that the aspect of consequentiality was too vague at Deliberation Day. Although this aspect was intensively discussed in class already, participants wanted to know even more concretely what would actually happen with their ideas and opinions. The moderators thus concluded that a more specific aim, such as a concrete proposal, would be useful in the future. Moreover, the moderators were disappointed by the fact that some very good ideas of participants would get lost because they were not directly related to the topic. This problem is with the very nature of a Deliberative Poll which does not really allow accommodating for new suggestions. Smith (2009) has criticized this phenomenon as a lack of creativity in the deliberative process. In addition, the moderators deemed the topic as too broad, making it complicated at times to effectively structure the sessions. Sometimes participants wanted to discuss very different issues of the matter, making it hard for the moderators to keep everyone engaged on the same point. Nonetheless, all moderators had a very positive impression of Deliberation Day as a whole, in particular because its participants were interested and enthusiastic to deliberate with fellow students.

So far, Deliberative Polls have served as advisory bodies to policy makers. One way to increase the actual popular control, as well as the legitimacy of the recommendations, is to complement this democratic innovation with a more traditional form of direct legislation: a student-wide referendum. As described by Smith (2009), a similar procedure has already taken place in British Columbia when a so-called Citizens' Assembly was organized and nearly a year of deliberation was followed by a popular referendum.

## Participants' Perspectives

A post-deliberation survey on participants' subjective evaluations of the process and the event as a whole has been an integral part of many Deliberative Polls conducted to date. The main purpose of this exercise is to gain insight into participants' perception of the different parts of the process, to detect group dynamics, and to find out whether participants experienced deliberation as rewarding and would be willing to contribute to future deliberative referendums. In the specific context of Jacobs University, this survey was also important in assessing the perception of including a deliberative referendum into decision making processes in the future, as well as in estimating possible effects events such as Deliberation Day on student participation in general.

After Deliberation Day, participants responded to 16 evaluation items assembled from surveys conducted by Fishkin (2010) as well as by Andersen and Hansen (2007), supplemented by items pertaining specifically to the context of Jacobs University. The items were roughly divided into three fields: perception of the small group discussions (10 items), evaluation of the information material and the expert session (3 items) and evaluation of the event as a whole (3 items), using five-point scales.

### *Small Group Discussions*

As the small group discussions constitute the essence of the deliberative experience and are also a much-contested aspect of Deliberative Polls, most of the evaluation questions were dedicated to this part of the event. Specifically, it was aimed at gaining insight into perceived group dynamics as well as possible distortions of a fair process. There has been extensive controversy on possible adverse dynamics in small group deliberation, such as consensus-seeking, polarization, or domination by a small number of group members (for conflicting viewpoints see Schkade et al. 2007; Fishkin 2009: ch. 5). The occurrence of such developments at Deliberation Day at Jacobs University would have hinted at possible shortcomings in the concrete implementation, but could also have questioned the legitimacy of the process in

general, affecting important criteria of the deliberative process such as substantive balance, diversity of viewpoints, and equal consideration.

**Table 7: Items related to small group sessions**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
From the beginning on there was consensus in the small group.	1	12	5	1	1
Towards the end there was consensus in the small group.	0	7	4	7	2
There was consensus in my group on the way to deliberate.	0	0	3	14	3
My group moderators provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussion.	0	0	1	5	13
The members of my group participated relatively equally in the discussion.	1	4	3	10	2
The discussions were superficial.	3	10	4	2	1
There was too little time to discuss.	0	9	4	4	3
Some members dominated the small group discussion.	0	5	8	6	1
My group moderators sometimes tried to influence the group with their opinion.	9	9	2	0	0
The members of my small group respected each other's views.	0	0	1	12	7

*Note: Absolute number of responses, N=20.*

Perceptions on consensus in the small group discussions were interestingly rather divided in both groups, with neither uniform agreement nor disagreement both at the beginning and at the end of the process. In both groups, some participants identified an emerging consensus at

the end of the event, however perception remained rather spread. At the same time, a majority of participants in both groups indicated that there had been consensus on the way to deliberate. Since in the concept of deliberation the sustained presence of a diversity of viewpoints is clearly favored over consensus within the small group discussions, the actual process hence corresponded quite closely to the ideal scenario, especially since despite substantive disagreement, participants were apparently able to follow a common set of rules. This is also in line with the widely reported perception that all group members respected each other's opinions.

Regarding the contributions of different group members to the discussion, there were interesting differences between the two groups<sup>7</sup>, supporting the moderators' impressions. Whereas in one group participants reported that members participated equally and that the discussion was not dominated by some persons, members of the other responded differently to both of these items. Given the consistency of these responses, it appears that the dynamics in the second group were indeed different than envisaged. However, participants apparently did not attribute this to the performance of the moderators, which were evaluated positively by both groups. Remarkably, specifically in the second group participants in fact indicated that the moderators had provided the opportunity for all members to participate. Although the discussions were not perceived as superficial by any participants, at least roughly a third of the members of both groups thought that there had not been enough time to discuss. While this remained a minority opinion, this can be seen as a positive surprise given the initial skepticism voiced by some organizers on whether the groups would need the full time dedicated to the discussions.

#### *Brochure and Experts*

17 out of 20 students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the brochure provided prior to deliberation day provided balanced information on the topic. The validity of

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<sup>7</sup> Due to the very low number of cases resulting from splitting the participants into two small groups, testing these differences for statistical significance is not insightful here. Emphasis is therefore put on whether there seem to be consistent general patterns in the frequencies of answers to certain questions, not on differences in means.

this finding obviously depends on whether participants had actually read the material, which is somewhat called into question by the experience of previous deliberative referendums (e.g. Luskin et al. 2007). Despite the comparatively minor length of the brochure, the moderators indeed had the impression that several participants had not thoroughly read the material prior to the event, so that the responses to this time may not be overly insightful.

The items referring to the expert session display the most pronounced spread of opinions of all evaluation items. While half of the participants reported that the session had helped them to clarify their position on the issue at hand, the remaining participants were split between a quarter that neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and a quarter that disagreed, with two participants indicating strong disagreement. A quite similar pattern emerged with respect to the evaluation of experts' competence to answer questions. This relatively high number of participants perceiving no particular value added by the expert session might be attributed to the rather non-technical nature of the question of community service, which necessitated relatively little expert advice. In that sense, it might very well be the case that the criterion of comprehensive information was largely fulfilled even though participants did not drive most of that knowledge from the expert session.

**Table 8: Items related to the information material and expert session**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The brochure provided balanced information on the topic of community service.	0	3	0	14	3
The expert session helped me to clarify my position on the issue.	2	3	5	9	1
The experts were competent to answer our questions on the issue.	3	1	6	8	2

*Note: Absolute number of responses, N=20.*

### Overall Evaluation

The overall evaluation of the event can only be described as overwhelmingly positive. Three quarters of the participants saw the event as a valuable experience, and 18 out of 20 participants agreed that events like Deliberation Day should be used more often to develop policies affecting students at Jacobs University. While the former finding concurs with the stipulations of James Fishkin (2009), the latter one indicates more support for the use of such events than it has typically been found on a macro level (e.g. Andersen & Hansen 2007). This support may reflect a particular preference for substantive involvement in the rather limited setting of a small university, which may mitigate some of the concerns typically raised with respect to implementation on a larger level (such as a very low probability to be selected in a deliberative event resulting in the exclusion of most citizens from any involvement in the political process). Also, the item explicitly did not refer to making the outcomes of deliberation binding, which would not have been practical in this instance because the policy decision was not at the discretion of the student body. Yet, it would certainly be interesting to know whether the support would have been equally high among students who did not get the chance to participate.

**Table 9: Evaluation of the overall event**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Overall, participating in the event was a valuable experience.	0	0	5	8	7
Such events should be used more often to develop policies on issues affecting students at Jacobs University.	0	1	1	11	7
After participation in Deliberation Day, I want to become more active in student affairs at Jacobs University.	0	1	7	8	4

*Note: Absolute number of responses, N=20.*

Finally, it appears that Deliberation Day in itself may have contributed to student involvement at Jacobs University, since more than half of the participants indicated an increased willingness to become engaged in student affairs after participation in the event. In summary, participants' widely positive evaluation of the event suggests that future deliberative experiments would be well-received by students at Jacobs University and could become a welcome innovation in community governance.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in the previous sections, despite some flaws, Deliberation Day was successful not only by Fishkin's (2009) own criteria, but also by improving on some of the observed shortcomings of Deliberative Polls. This section will judge Deliberation Day at Jacobs University against a broader set of criteria. Following the framework outlined by Graham Smith (2009: 20-26), the six criteria are: 1) inclusiveness; 2) popular control; 3) considered judgment; 4) transparency; 5) efficiency; 6) transferability. The table below summarizes the performance of Deliberation Day according to Smith's (2009) criteria, which partially overlap with Fishkin's but clearly go beyond them.

**Table 10: Summary evaluation of Deliberation Day at Jacobs University according to Smith's (2009) criteria**

Criterion	Description	Evaluation	
		Strengths	Shortcomings
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Every citizen has the opportunity to participate and the incentives to become engaged are effective; specific social groups do not end up being marginalized or excluded; everyone is able to voice their opinion	Every undergraduate student at Jacobs University had the chance to be selected and incentives were offered in return for participation; during the small group sessions and the plenary one everyone had the opportunity to speak up. The selection of participants was better documented than usual in Deliberative Polls and the response rate higher (one	There were some problems with self-selection; one of the small groups had some dominant speakers, but moderators did their best to mitigate the situation

		third of those invited attended)	
<b>Popular control</b>	Citizens have control over significant elements of the decision-making process; the authorities take the results into consideration when making a decision	The student organizers set the agenda themselves; the University's leadership showed great interest in the results	The referendum has not yet taken place.
<b>Considered judgment</b>	All voiced opinions are equally considered and valued	Participants believed that in the small group sessions all opinions were considered equally and everyone was given the chance to talk	The role of the moderator deserves more attention
<b>Transparency</b>	The general population is capable of carefully analyzing the activities and decisions of the deliberation process	The organizers made sure that the students knew that a deliberative referendum was taking place on campus and used posters, e-mails and newspaper articles to inform everyone	The student body should be provided with more detailed information regarding the results and implications of deliberation at Jacobs University
<b>Efficiency</b>	The costs of organizing such an event are outweighed by the benefits	The financial costs were very limited	The student organizers put a lot of time and effort into the event, more than the workload of a regular course
<b>Transferability</b>	The design of the event can easily be transferred to other locations	Deliberation Day at Jacobs University showed that the format can work successfully at a university	-

As can be seen in Table 10, the strengths outweigh the shortcomings. In several respects, Deliberation Day at Jacobs University improved on Deliberative Polls that have been organized around the world, for example with respect to documentation of the sampling and selection of participants, the participation rate, the choice of the topic for deliberation, and the commitment of decision makers to take the outcomes seriously. On the downside, it seems that the problem of group domination could not be entirely solved, the information campaign was designed more to boost the participation rate than properly inform the broader public,<sup>8</sup> and the

<sup>8</sup> The only exception was an article in the student newspaper by one of the student organizers (Blümmert 2010).

costs of organizing Deliberation Day and analyzing the results in terms of time and effort were considerable, going beyond what is normally expected of students in a 5 ECTS course.<sup>9</sup> A more fundamental problem is the role of the moderator. Because students were looking for guidance, they received a basic training in public speaking and moderation. However, the position of these small group moderators in democratic theory is unclear (Sanders 2010) and we cannot simply assume that they are merely 'neutral technicians' (p.42).

Another point of reference are the 'Campus Conversations' organized since 2005 at Carnegie Mellon university. They come in two types: Deliberative Polls and Deliberative Loops. The Deliberative Poll at Carnegie Mellon closely follows Fishkin's model of a Deliberative Poll whereas the Deliberative Loop is a much less demanding and ambitious exercise in deliberation. As explained by one of the driving forces and initiators, Robert Cavalier (2008: 17), 'college campuses are uniquely positioned to play an important role' in putting deliberative democracy into practice. Carnegie Mellon even developed a handbook for college-level deliberative polling.<sup>10</sup> The Campus Conversations program has three objectives: to teach deliberative skills, to promote a commitment to civic engagement and social responsibility, and to encourage substantive interaction among members of the university community.

In comparison to Deliberation Day at Jacobs University, the deliberative events at Carnegie Mellon exhibit some weaknesses. First, they have always had a problem with participation. Despite huge random samples, frequently no more than one per cent of those sampled attended. To increase the numbers of participants, convenience sampling was used. However, targeting students rather than sampling them introduces selection bias and leads to an unrepresentative sample. By consequence, whatever the outcome of the Campus Conversations, little can be said with certainty about what the broader campus would have thought if they have been able to participate in this conversation. In other words, the crucial asset of having a mini public representative of the broader public is lost. Second, control

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<sup>9</sup> Also, we did not check whether opinions remained stable after Deliberation Day. Previous research has shown that the effects of deliberation may wane (Andersen and Hansen 2007).

<sup>10</sup> [http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/cc/CC\\_Handbook\\_Final.pdf](http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/cc/CC_Handbook_Final.pdf).

groups, where present, are not included in the analysis. In general, the analysis often lacks detail, with information on the size of the sample or significance levels missing. Again, this makes it difficult to assess the effects of the deliberative process and the representativeness of the findings. Third, popular control of the process, to use Smith's term, is weak. It is not clear who decided the topics of the campus conversations – which stretched from university to global issues - and little is said about the outcomes. In fact, one would have expected Campus Conversations at Carnegie Mellon to have been better embedded in the decision-making structures by now. This partly reflects a more general confusion about the exact role of mini publics (consultative or decisive) (see Levinson 2010) and Fishkin himself has been rather evasive (see Fishkin 2010). Fourth, over time there is a shift from Deliberative Polling to Deliberative Loops at Carnegie Mellon. Deliberative Loops last only two hours and have fewer participants. As a result, the quality of deliberation appears to suffer.<sup>11</sup> Fifth, the Campus Conversations do not seem to be tied to a course and the organization is in the hands of university administration. In contrast, at Jacobs University, Deliberation Day was organized by students and embedded in a course, thus providing for experiential learning. In that sense, the format at Jacobs University is closer to the experiment with a Citizens' Assembly for Critical Thinking About the United States (CACTUS), a course modeled after the Citizens' Assembly in Canada and likewise followed by a referendum (Gershtenson et al. 2010). However, student involvement seems to have been limited to participation in the assembly. Different from our course at Jacobs University, at Eastern Kentucky University, the organization and analysis was done by the instructors.<sup>12</sup> To make full use of the potential of mini publics as an 'educative forum' (Fung 2003: 340) all those involved should undergo its transformative effects, not just the deliberators.

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<sup>11</sup> See the final report on the Deliberative Loop on financing student health care at Carnegie Mellon, which identifies problems of understanding of the policy options available.

<http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/dean/conversations/past/2009-2010/studenthealth-final-report.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Another important difference is the self-selection of participants. Unfortunately, Gershtenson et al. (2010) say little about the referendum itself.

Simone Chambers (2009) has complained about the attention given in political theory to mini publics at the expense of the mass public. Her recommendation is to think about ways to make mass democracy itself more deliberative. The Deliberative Referendum forms an alternative solution to the danger of 'participatory elitism' (Chambers 2009: 344), combining mini publics with a classic referendum. At Jacobs University, it has proven difficult to sustain the momentum and no referendum has yet been organized. Unless and until this happens, and the signs are good that a referendum will indeed take place this fall semester, the Deliberative Referendum remains incomplete.

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