

## *All In Action Plan: SUNY Cortland*

15 December 2017

### PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### *Who developed this action plan?*

This action plan was developed by John Suarez, SUNY Cortland's director of the Institute for Civic Engagement, and by Cynthia Guy, the Institute's Community Outreach Coordinator.

#### *What is the action plan for, and what does it hope to accomplish?*

This action plan aims to meet two goals: Helping people (who hold opposing views on contentious issues) engage in civil and informed discussion of such issues. Building on that, we would like to more deeply integrate civic learning and participation into our campus culture so that our graduates are more likely to not only vote, but to participate in other forms of civic engagement as well.

#### *Where will the action plan be implemented?*

The plan will be implemented both on- and off-campus in Cortland, Dryden, and Ithaca, NY. Locations will grow applied learning courses and from civic-learning events. Some events will be on-campus; some will be in the community. Almost all of the on-campus events will be free and open to the public; all of the events in the community will be so.

#### *Why was this action plan developed?*

This plan is being developed for a few reasons. The first is that our institution's president, Dr. Erik Bitterbaum, is a vocal advocate for civic learning and participation; he often encourages us to be "stewards of place." President Bitterbaum directed Institute for Civic Engagement staff to develop this plan.

Because of troubling discussions before and after the 2016 elections, the Institute's staff has been working with student leaders to develop deliberative dialogs; these dialogs have become a part of the president's more inclusive idea.

#### *When does this action plan start and end?*

Our Working Group will meet on January 12, 2018; the Committee will meet in early February. Our plan calls for our first event to take place in early March. The plan will end in mid-November 2018, after we assess voter turn-out after the midterm elections. At that point, we will evaluate the action plan's success so that we can refine the plan for the next year.

#### *How will this action plan be implemented?*

We will conduct a progression of activities across our three campuses (SUNY Cortland, Tompkins/Cortland Community College [TC3], and Cornell University). We will focus on developing working relationships between people of opposing view-points, then we will host issues-education presentations.

## PART II: LEADERSHIP

*Who (individual and/or office) is coordinating and overseeing the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement?*

John Suarez, director of the Institute for Civic Engagement, is coordinating and overseeing SUNY Cortland's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement.

*Who is chairing the working group?*

The working group will be chaired by John Suarez

*What is the role of the working group?*

The working group's role is multi-faceted; it advises the project's Committee on the plan's development, execution, and evaluation.

*How will working group members be selected?*

We aim for a group that includes at least one member from each of these populations: students, faculty and staff from the academic and student affairs, not-for-profits, and elected officials.

*What are working group members' responsibilities?*

Working Group members will help Committee members guide the project's development and assessment.

*How is the working group inclusive of different campus and community stakeholders?*

The working group includes students, staff, and faculty from three colleges/universities, as well as people who represent political and nonpartisan organizations.

*Who are the working group members and how are they involved?*

To be determined.

*What academic departments and which faculty within academic affairs are involved?*

Two TC3 faculty members – one in English and the other in Biology – are involved.

*What units within student affairs are involved and which administrators are involved?*

SUNY Cortland's Multicultural Life Office has been invited to participate.

*Which students and student organizations are involved?*

SUNY Cortland's Young Republicans and NYPIRG clubs are participating.

*What community and/or national (private, nonprofit, government) organizations are involved?*

The City of Cortland's Mayor is participating, as is the League of Women Voters, which has an unofficial representative.

*Is the working group coordinating with the local election office? If so, with whom and how?*

At the moment, we are not partnering with the Cortland County Board of Elections.

*How often will the working group meet?*

Our Working Group will meet once/month.

### PART III: COMMITMENT

*How does the institution and its leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement? Is there an explicit, visible commitment on the part of the governing board, president/chancellor, and senior leadership?*

SUNY Cortland's president instructed the director of the Institute for Civic Engagement to participate in the *All In Campaign*.

*Is the commitment communicated within the institution? To whom, specifically, and how?*

Within our college, that commitment is communicated through the President's office and through other offices and departments. President Bitterbaum, for example, raises the importance of civic learning and democratic engagement during presentations at the beginning of each semester. The president and other officials, including Board members, do so during our annual Academic Convocation, at which first-year students begin their college journeys.

President Bitterbaum and other administrators email messages about, and they speak in person about, democratic engagement at campus-wide events that address issues such as racial intolerance, and they do so in response to related national events.

The college supports events such as voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts; it hosts Election Day Watch events; it has supported students as poll watchers during elections; it has supported speeches by nationally-recognized speakers such as David Clay Johnson, and speeches and panel discussions by candidates for local and state offices.

The college also hosts *Sandwich Seminars* and *Roundtable Discussions* on related issues.

*Is the commitment communicated outside the institution (i.e., to external stakeholders and the general public)? To whom, specifically, and how?*

These events are promoted to the public through a variety of media, and the events are free and open to the public.

*Is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement a pervasive-part of institutional culture? Is it ongoing, consistent, systematic, and sustainable across programs, departments, and the entire institution? How do you know?*

Based on campus announcements, we know that educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is a growing part of institutional culture. This project is helping to make such education and behavior systematic and sustainable.

*How is the institution's commitment reflected in existing statements and documents (e.g., mission statement, vision, core values, strategic plan)?*

SUNY Cortland's commitment is reflected in existing statements, such as its Mission Statement: "SUNY Cortland is an academic community dedicated to diverse learning experiences. Students grow as engaged citizens with a strong social conscience fostered by outstanding teaching, scholarship and service." Our Vision Statement's first sentence echoes this focus: "SUNY

Cortland will be a college of opportunity, from which students graduate with the knowledge, integrity, skills and compassion to excel as leaders, citizens, scholars, teachers and champions of excellence.”

*What are the institution’s overall civic, democratic, and/or political learning outcomes? Is there a process in place to ensure that outcomes are measured and met?*

Such learning outcomes are embedded in courses such as

- CPN 102/103 – Writing in the Community I and II (both are service-learning courses)
- POL 100 – Introduction to American Government and Politics. Includes examining who has power.
- PHI 140 – Prejudice, Discrimination, and Morality. Issues to be discussed may include affirmative action, political liberty and civil disobedience, and equality.
- PHI 240 – Social and Political Philosophy
- POL 102 – Foundations of Democracy. Includes rights and liberties.
- POL 110 – Politics and Multiculturalism. Addresses efforts to deal with injustice.
- POL 120 – Student Government Practicum.
- POL 121 – Participation in Politics and Government

*How is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement included in the general education curriculum? Please refer to courses listed above.*

*How is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement included in the co-curriculum?*  
Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is included in the co-curriculum through organizations such as the Political Science Association, Young Republicans, College Democrats, and other SGA clubs. Institute for Civic Engagement.

#### PART IV: LANDSCAPE

*Are civic learning and democratic engagement overall campus learning outcomes?*

Yes, per the range of activities and courses named above.

*What does assessment data show about the political climate and democratic engagement on campus? How does this data compare to that of peer institutions?*

Our August 2017 NSLVE data show our 2016

- Voter registration rate at 77.5%, a 2.8% increase from 74.7% in 2012. The number of students who registered increased to 5,352 (from 5,329 – in spite of a drop of 228 students in total enrollment).
- Voting rate of registered students at 46.2%, a 1.1% increase from 45.1%.
- Total voting rate rose from 33.7% to 35.8%, a 2.1% increase.

In spite of those increases, we still lag behind all other surveyed institutions.

- Our total voting rate in 2012 was 13.2% below other surveyed institutions.
- In 2016 the difference was even more dramatic, at 14.6%.

*How is civic learning and democratic engagement present in the curriculum?*

*In which courses is it taught?*

Refer to courses listed in Part III.

*In which courses is it listed as a learning outcome?*

It is listed as a learning outcome in many of the “POL” courses.

*How is civic learning and democratic engagement present in the co-curriculum? In which departments is this incidental? What initiatives, programs, and activities focus on this?*

It is incidental in Health Promotion and in the Multicultural Life and Diversity Office through anti-bias projects and programs such as campus-wide presentations, speeches, and videos.

*What internal barriers (e.g., limited funding, staff resistance, lack of leadership) prevent the institution from being successful?*

Although we have strong administrative support for such programs, student interest and participation in civic decision-making activities is minimal.

*What external barriers (e.g., election laws, voter ID laws, lack of proximity to polling location) prevent the institution from being successful?*

None that I am aware of.

*What resources are available to help the institution be successful?*

Our working relationships with local government officials can be a resource.

*What additional resources are needed to help the institution be successful?*

The United University Professionals has helped in this kind of work.

## PART V: GOALS

### *Long-term Goals*

- *What impact is desired?*

We are planning to develop a three-part, sequenced model that establishes an empathic culture; in such an environment, civil, informed, and productive engagement in civic decision-making can flourish. Our intent is to pilot a program that can mature into community-wide behavior that continually reinforces skills and dispositions such as reflective listening, curiosity, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and initiative.

- *What knowledge, skills, and capacities (learning outcomes) does the institution want students to achieve and graduate with in order to be active and informed?*

We want students to develop the skills and dispositions named immediately above, along with an understanding of how national and international issues “play-out” at local levels.

- *What does the institution want to accomplish over the next 10 years?*

We want to establish the culture described above.

### *Short-Term Goals – What does the institution want to accomplish in the next year or two?*

#### *What needs to be accomplished in order to move towards the achievement of long-term goals?*

We want to pilot and assess this initial program design by establishing long-term project-based relationships with regional elected officials and not-for-profit organizations, and with student clubs at SUNY Cortland and at regional institutions of higher education,.

## PART VI: STRATEGY

*What is the work? What are the planned activities?*

Our planned activities will sequence in three overlapping steps:

1. Establishing a civil atmosphere between people of opposing view-points through
  - a. *Engaged Empathy* events – Informal gatherings (around food) in which people with different points of view pair-up to get to know each other as a way of developing mutual respect.
  - b. *Democratic Deliberations* – Civil, informed, and facilitated small-group discussions about contentious issues. A key goal is for participants to identify common values. Ideally, the Engaged Empathy participants will join these Deliberations.
2. Conducting issues-education activities in the form of speeches, panel discussions, and/or debates.
3. Conducting voter-registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns.

We want these three steps to include long-term residents in our three communities.

*Who will do the work? Who is responsible for implementing each planned activity?*

The Project's Committee members will do the work, with the Work Group helping to ensure success.

*Who is the work for? Who is the audience for each activity?*

The primary audience is composed of the three campus' students; however, we want to include our communities' long-residents as well.

*Where will the work happen? Where will each activity occur on campus?*

Planning will take place at each of our campuses, with Work Group and Committee members visiting other members' campuses. Additional planning will take place through email and conference calls.

Activities on the SUNY Cortland campus will take place in venues such as Jacobus Lounge and (especially for voter-registration), the steps of Corey Union, in front of the Student Life Center, and in classrooms.

*When will the work happen? When will each activity occur on campus?*

The planning has already begun, with our next two meetings scheduled for mid-January (Working Group) and early February (Committee). We would like our first event (Engaged Empathy) to take place in early March.

*What is the purpose of the work? Why is each activity being implemented, and what is the goal for each activity?*

The purpose is to nurture a culture of civil and informed civic engagement, primarily in our regional post-secondary student populations, but also in our long-term resident populations. Each activity's goal is to contribute (as described earlier) to success in reaching this goal.

## PART VII: REPORTING

*How will the plan be shared, internally and externally? Please state where the plan will be shared.*

At SUNY Cortland, the plan will be shared through a variety of media:

- In a Sandwich Seminar event. Two Sandwich Seminars are held each week during our fall and spring semesters. They are free and open to the public.
- Through the Institute for Civic Engagement's
  - Monthly newsletter, which is distributed as a paper-based document and as a PDF email attachment to the campus and to not-for-profit agencies.
  - Webpage
  - Social media pages, such as Facebook
- At an Student Government Association meeting.

*Will the plan be made public? If so, how?*

Yes, the plan will be made public through the Institute for Civic Engagement's newsletter, which is shared via email with not-for-profit agencies.

*Will the data used to inform the plan be made public? If so, how?*

Those data will be made public through the methods named above.

## PART VIII: EVALUATION

*What is the purpose of the evaluation? What does the institution want to know and be able to do with the information gathered?*

The evaluation's purposes are to

1. Determine the effectiveness of participant-recruitment efforts
2. Identify ways in which each one of the project's steps is effective. For example, we want to know the extent to which the *Enhanced Empathy* activities establish mutual respect.

We will use such results to refine our efforts for the next year.

*Who is the audience for the evaluation?*

The Working Group, the Committee, the SUNY Cortland president, and our Institutional Planning and Assessment Committee.

*Who will carry out the evaluation?*

John Suarez will supervise the evaluation.

*When will the evaluation be carried out and completed?*

We will conduct surveys and assessments after each event, and we will conduct a project evaluation in mid-November.

*What information (data, evidence) must be collected and how will it be collected? What are the performance measures and indicators of success?*

We are interested in the following kinds of information:

- Quantitative –
  - The number of students and long-term residents who participate in individual events.
  - The number of students and long-term residents who participate in multiple events.
  - The number of students and long-term residents who register to vote.
  - [Through NSLVE] The number of students who vote.
- Qualitative – Students', residents', and presenters'
  - Comments
  - Suggestions

*How will information (data, evidence) be analyzed?*

We will track statistical data, and we will conduct qualitative analyses of comments as a way of refining our message and our plan.

*How will the results of the evaluation be shared?*

We will share the information through the outlets named above, as well as through a press release (through SUNY Cortland's Communication's Office) to local news outlets.