



**ACTION PLAN TO INCREASE CIVIC LEARNING, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT, and VOTING RATES**  
Center for Community Engagement  
**2018-19**

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Otterbein's Action Plan was developed by a team of colleagues at the Center for Community Engagement, students, and other campus stakeholders. We seek to engage our campus in efforts to define civic engagement both in and outside the classroom, increase student voter registration and participation, integrate civic engagement into the curriculum, and engage students in the civic work of our communities.

## **II. LEADERSHIP**

The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement team at Otterbein, responsible for implementing the action plan, will include multiple stakeholders from across the campus, including students, faculty, and staff. The team will meet bi-monthly to clarify goals, determine implementation plans, develop community, and network with community constituencies.

Dr. Melissa Kesler Gilbert, Associate Dean of Experiential Learning, will co-chair the team, housed at the university's Center for Community Engagement, with Stacey Rusterholz, Assistant Director of the Center and advisor to the bi-partisan student group, *Raise Your Voice*.

Other stakeholders will include:

- Library Faculty: developing programming around Constitution Day and Voter Registration
- The Chaplain: implementing ally training and civic dialogs across campus
- Raise Your Voice (student organization): designing voter registration drives, campus debates, and civic conversations
- Residence Life: hosting debates and dialogs
- League of Women's Voters (community partner): facilitating candidate town halls, hosting voter education sessions
- Ohio Campus Compact (community partner): CEEP Campus Election and Engagement Project
- Marketing & Communications Department: promoting campus-wide events, connecting to local, regional, and national media
- Political Science and Communications Faculty: teaching civic engagement courses, hosting campus debates, engaging students as poll workers, canvassers, campaign assistants

## **III. COMMITMENT**

Otterbein University is committed to enhancing civic learning on our campus and the democratic engagement of our students.

A. *Our commitment is evident throughout our **guiding documents** and will serve as both the motivation and the scaffolding for all of our work:*

### **Vision**

Otterbein University will be nationally recognized as a model community of educators, leaders, and learners who set the pace for higher education and **contribute to the common good**.

### **Mission**

Otterbein is an inclusive community dedicated to educating the whole person in the context of humane values. Our mission is to prepare graduates to think deeply and broadly, to **engage locally and globally**, and to **advance** their professions and **communities**. An Otterbein education is distinguished by the intentional blending of the liberal arts and professional studies, combined with a unique approach to integrating direct experience into all learning.

### **Core Values**

#### **Service**

We are committed to **fostering a culture of social responsibility, civic engagement**, and meaningful service to our communities.

B. *Our commitment is also evident in our **intentional and integrated curriculum**.*

- Our **general education** instruction, known at Otterbein as “Integrated Studies” (INST) emphasizes civic engagement. One of the primary goals of INST is:

**GOAL: To encourage purposeful public engagement and social responsibility.**

#### *Outcomes:*

- 1) Students demonstrate the intellectual and practical skills necessary for meaningful work and active participation in the local community and the larger world.
  - 2) Students investigate multiple and evolving forms of **civic identification** and belonging, with particular attention to the **practice of citizenship** in local, national and global contexts.
  - 3) Students explore the value of purposeful action in the face of the pressing problems of the 21st century.
  - 4) Students come to see themselves as responsible, engaged and informed persons, capable and **willing to act in ways that will improve or reshape the world**.
- Our commitment to experiential learning promotes the high impact practice of **service-learning**, offering over 75 service-learning courses and fellowship opportunities for community-based research.

C. *Our commitment is also evident in the **institutionalization of two offices** on campus who are responsible for civic engagement and social justice initiatives: *The Center for Community Engagement and The Office of Social Justice**

## IV. LANDSCAPE

Otterbein's landscape of civic learning and engagement is robust, with curricular and co-curricular efforts that have shown to be effective in meeting agreed upon campus learning objectives.

*Learning Outcomes:* The campus has identified campus-wide learning outcomes for our students: Knowledgeable, Multiliterate, Engaged, Responsible, and Inquisitive, known on our campus as KMERI. In each of these areas, there is an emphasis on several learning outcomes that directly align with civic work.

*The Five Cardinal Experiences:* Given the university's emphasis on experiential learning through our Five Cards initiative, our campus climate also encourages, supports financially, and rewards students who participate in "community engagement" – one of the Five Cards. Community Engagement is one of the most accessible pathways students take to deepen their civic understanding.

*Measures of Civic Learning and Engagement:* We have developed several standardized instruments on our campus to measure knowledge of community, civic competencies, civic awareness, social responsibility, and levels of civic engagement. For example, the **CardinalCorps Survey** is given to all students who engage in community service each semester. [Results will be shared later]

*National Surveys:* We also participate in several national surveys that provide information on civic engagement, including: NSLVE, NSSE, CIRP, and the Campus Compact Annual Survey. Part of our action plan for 2018-19 is to explore existing data as it relates to civic outcomes. Our NSLVE data has revealed:

- **2016 Voting Rate** = 60% (a 2.5 increase from 2012) – Higher than peers in our Carnegie Classification
- **Registration Rate** = 82%
- **Voting Rate of Registered Students** = 73%

*Internal Barriers:* For students who feel politically connected to their hometown, they often want to vote locally and register with their home address; however, they do not request an absentee ballot, and then do not get home to vote. Also, given both the breadth and the scope of community work on our campus, our staff is limited in the amount of time we can devote specifically to voting campaigns for our students.

*External Barriers:* For our voter registration drives, we often have external agencies come to campus and register students incorrectly. Our campus is divided by a geographic boundary that separates two polling locations, which also adds to the confusion. Students also need help understanding the appropriate ID and other materials they might need to vote (proof of residency/utility bill).

## V. GOALS

### A. LONG-TERM

- **Goal One:** To increase campus voting rates by 10% and focus on undergraduate voting
- **Goal Two:** To increase the number of civic engagement service-learning courses
- **Goal Three:** To develop faculty expertise in the area of teaching toward the "public good"
- **Goal Four:** Deepen students' ability to engage in civic dialogue

## B. SHORT-TERM

- Goal One: Increase the number of registered students by 20% through First Friday registration campaign
- Goal Two: Train 20% of faculty in service-learning and civic learning strategies
- Goal Three: Design voter awareness education materials for website
- Goal Four: Increase number of students volunteering in weekly programs, especially Raise Your Voice

## VI. STRATEGIES

To meet both our long and short term goals, the CLDE team will work together to engage the Otterbein community in the following planned activities for the 2018-19 academic year:

- ✓ The Library will host public forums with local and regional candidates
- ✓ The Chaplain and Office of Social Justice will institutionalize a Civil Discourse and Freedom of Expression initiative
- ✓ Raise Your Voice will host: debate viewing forums for national candidates; student debates on critical local topics; and showcase current legislative bills
- ✓ League of Women Voters will host voter education sessions and share educational materials with students
- ✓ CCE will add voter registration info to website with additional educational materials
- ✓ Campus will increase communication by senior administrators about voter registration and civic responsibility
- ✓ CCE will collaborate with academic affairs to host trainings to educate faculty members about teaching toward civic engagement, service-learning strategies, promoting civil discourse in the classroom, and actively engaging students in efforts to address the “public good.”
- ✓ The CCE will develop a volunteer recruitment and mobilization plan to engage more students in community service, the scaffolding for civic awareness and the development of civic competencies

## VII. REPORTING

We will convene the CLDE team to develop a communications plan to share the data used to inform the plan, the action plan itself, and the outcomes of the civic work.

## VIII. EVALUATION

The CCE and the CLDE team will work collaboratively to evaluate progress toward goals. Both formative and summative evaluations will be implemented over the course of the academic year for the purpose of improving our plan and engaging our students. We will use both our tested standardized instruments that measure civic awareness, civic competencies, and social responsibility as well as new instruments designed specifically for this project. Student Affairs is currently an Assessment Plan for the division that will include a streamlined instrument designed with our Office of Institutional Effectiveness. This instrument will include additional measures of success in meeting our long- and short-term goals.