



CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE

*Western Carolina University
Action Plan*

Spring 2018

Introduction

“The citizenship virtues of benevolence, ethical and moral behavior, character, civility, and community are important to learn now. If a student graduates without these understandings, they will most likely never get them (personal communication, September 1, 2012).” – Dr. W. Roger Webb, former university president Northeastern State University (1978-1997) and University of Central Oklahoma (1997-2011)

To us, the idea that if “a student graduates without these understandings, they will most likely never get them” is very resounding. If engaged students do not capture the spirit of community and civic engagement during the time they and others are investing so much into their personal and professional development, we are hard pressed to imagine another period of concentrated focus that could generate the passion, knowledge, and commitment demanded by an engaged democracy. To bridge this development space WCU’s Civic Action Plan (CAP) was created in conjunction with Campus Compact. To harness the spirit of youthful members of a democracy and as an integral component of the CAP, the Student Democracy Coalition (SDC) was formed. The Student Democracy Coalition was created when the Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF) and Campus Vote Project (CVP) brought their organizations and an intentional partnership to Western Carolina University (WCU). The CAP serves as a resource that shaped WCU’s approach to being and heeding the All In Challenge!

WCU was established as a normal (teaching) school in 1889 to bring education and career/social development opportunities to the western region of North Carolina (southern Appalachian mountain region). Like many institutions founded in rural areas, WCU was established to infuse one of the most important components and resources for community development and social stabilizing – education. The founders of WCU recognized the importance of formalized higher education for their community’s and state’s development and continue to invest on these fronts today. This regional institution quickly outgrew its facilities and increased its faculties, but never lost its roots and purpose. That purpose is boldly stated and pursued through the 2020 mission, vision, and strategic plan (addressed in this section) created in 2012.

These two specific CAP principles matter now and are directly related to the civic development purposes of higher education and WCU’s approach to being All In:

- We prepare our students for engaged citizenship to deliberate and lead for public good.
- We harness institutional capacity to challenge prevailing inequalities in our democracy.

- These two principles illuminate the path between two points that can assist institutions in navigating both charted and uncharted territories by focusing on a core purpose of higher education – preparing an engaged citizenry for a lasting democracy. At WCU, citizenship and civic/social responsibility are perceived and pursued as crafts that can and should be learned within a higher education context. Imperative to understanding learning as a process is recognizing how learners’ beliefs, values, and experiences influence how meanings and perspectives are constructed. This particular point seems to be a primary concern of experiential educators and practitioners who align with pedagogies that work directly with local communities, and have the greater intention of 1) creating relevance in student learning, 2) addressing collaborative opportunities within a local community, and 3) cultivating a culture of community and civic engagement

Partisanship or political leaning are not the focus of this purpose. The focus is about finding the purpose (itself), understanding the purpose, and the tuning of their voice to align both foci through whatever partisan perspective aligns with the individual’s values.

With this, citizenship should be viewed as a craft that equals a whole, which is greater than the sum of its parts. By identifying the skills of a citizen as a set of skills or as a craft illuminates its potential to align with educational strategies in order to expose, connect, test, and confirm this body of knowledge with students’ perspectives and personal experiences. This is the premise for recognizing citizenship as a domain of knowledge dependent on experience and solidified through reflection. The CAP focuses on preparing and supporting students on their journeys towards a brighter, richer, more inclusive democracy. We believe that the sun is setting on the era of apathy and rising boldly on a future of informed, passionate, and steady democracy.



Student & Faculty Engagement in Civic Development

Civic Engagement Efforts Related to Civic Development through Students

& Faculty: Develops an emphasis on student leadership, professionalism, cultural responsiveness, and teamwork development as tools for preparing our students for engaged citizenship to deliberate and lead for the public good. The goal is to work towards the best interest of the region and the preparation of educated citizens who can make a difference in their respective fields and communities. While engaging students in community-based projects is paramount, a logical and robust avenue for an exponential and sustainable increase in students' civic engagement will be fostered by faculty.

Subcommittee Members: Kelsey Woodford (Graduate Student Association, President), Kevin Trudell (Higher Education Student Affairs MEd Student), Ricardo Nazario-Colon (Chief Diversity Officer), and Patricia Bricker (Teaching and Learning), Beth Wall-Bassett (Nutrition and Dietetics), and Lane Perry (Center for Service Learning)

Civic Engagement Efforts Related to Civic Development through Students

& Faculty: Support Goals & Delivery Points – These delivery points will serve as initiatives designed to operationalize each initiative in practical ways.

- Intentionally engage students with structured community-based projects in curricular and co-curricular capacities that respect an order of increasingly intensive experiences.
- Develop initiatives that guide students to make meaning of civic learning through the combination of direct experiences, academic instructions, and structured reflection.
- Prepare and develop interested faculty (who are at differing levels) on teaching methods associated with community-based learning pedagogies.
- Through faculty development designed to cultivate faculty leaders in community engagement, create a campus culture that recognizes the value and advocates for the use of community-based approaches across the curriculum.



DegreePlus

DegreePlus – Is WCU's Quality Enhancement Plan (2017) and represents an initiative focused on a holistic approach to student education in which students are encouraged to learn transferable skills through participation in extracurricular activities. It is an optional program for all students, but for those who choose to participate, DegreePlus will complement curricular learning and build on the premise that learning is not restricted to the classroom.

The four transferable skills associated DegreePlus are student leadership, professionalism, cultural responsiveness, and teamwork development, which are directly related to many of the skills necessary for engaged citizenship and employability.

DegreePlus is set up to expose students to each of the four competencies listed previously (Level 1), provide a space for the participants to reflect and articulate their perspective on each competency (Level 2), and finally to integrate and apply one of the four competencies in an experiential way (Level 3). In other words, students would be required to attend 5 events related to each competency (e.g., cultural responsiveness) before they would be able to move on to Level 2 of that specific skill. Level 2 is programmed through DegreePlus Day. Led by trained faculty and staff mentors, small group-based discussions will revolve around sharing experiences from the five activities with the main goal of getting students to think critically about their experiences. The final component (Level 3) will require students to complete a capstone project. Students can choose any experience that they feel exemplifies the application of any one of the four skill areas.

DegreePlus is designed to support students' "whole" university experience in which they focus on the academics of their specific programs while also growing through their involvement in extracurricular activities, and ultimately become prepared to be engaged citizens of the world.

Associated Goals

- Increase students' participation in extracurricular activities that promote transferable skill development.
- Enhance students' cultural responsiveness, leadership, professionalism, and teamwork skills.

Review Tool(s)

- Participation Data
- Event descriptions and student surveys of events
- Level 2 DegreePlus Day Reflections (using rubrics)
- Level 3 DegreePlus Day Presentations (using rubrics) Presentations (using rubrics) Participation Data

Champion(s)

DegreePlus Office, Center for Career & Professional Development, Center for Service Learning, and other programming partners across campus.

Student Democracy Coalition (SDC)

Student Democracy Coalition (SDC) – Has built from the ground up a massive campus-wide operation of voter engagement and advocacy efforts encompassing every corner of the institution. It was formed to provide a space for engaged students to capture the spirit of community and civic engagement and harness the spirit of youthful members of a democracy. The SDC was created when the AGF and CVP brought their organizations and an intentional partnership to WCU and the CSL. The SDC achieved their set goals using the REAC(+) MODEL and advance the coalition to organize around engagement.

The SDC created eight goals. These goals included:

- Establishing and maintaining an early voting polling place on WCU's campus in the University Center.
- Registering 75% of student body across campus through TurboVote, tabling efforts, classroom presentations, and other initiatives such as resident hall drives.
- Educating voters through programs, such as debate watch parties and Raise Your VOICE program.
- Developing a one-stop shop website with critical information (vote.wcu.edu) focused on ways to register to vote, for voters to educate themselves on the process and candidates/issues, for voters to learn how (where/when) they vote.
- Collaborating with faculty to incorporate a project-based group assignment to assist with voter registration, education programming, and marketing initiatives.
- Partnering with 22 entities across campus 17 registered student organizations.
- Developing a strategic and intentional marketing campaign.
- Organizing 2 advocacy/ awareness campaigns per year.

In the coming year(s) the SDC will be working to keep the students engaged, and help them to learn about how democracy does not have an off-season. The focus of the SDC in off-cycle election seasons is centered on education, awareness, and advocacy initiatives. The ultimate goal is to embed the SDC into the CSL's organization structure and to clarify, formalize, and align the programming and goals shared between the SDC and the CSL.

Associated Goals

- Increase student engagement in the democratic process.
- Promote a culture of civic engagement and community among the WCU campus.
- Advance efforts focused by relevant and nonpartisan issues (e.g., voter rights, net neutrality, online voter registration, etc.).

Review Tool(s)

- Number of programs planned
- Number of students reached through programs
- Percentage of voters from mid-term and presidential election cycles
- Successful advocacy campaigns that lead to polity/social change

Champion(s)

Center for Service Learning and the Chair of the Student Democracy Coalition/Lead Andrew Goodman Fellow.

Lily Community Engagement Award (LCEA)

Lily Community Engagement Award (LCEA) – Has been developed to encourage and recognize students who participate in and reflect on a wide range of WCU community engagement opportunities. Students can choose from community engagement opportunities in the following categories; direct community impact, donation/philanthropy, and awareness/advocacy. Students can earn Lily points by participating in service projects and reflecting on them. Each activity within each category has a point value associated with it. For example, an alternative spring break trip would fall into the direct community impact category and is worth 15 points. While if a student participates in the Hunger Banquet event, the event would be under the awareness/advocacy category and is worth 5 points.

Once a student has earned 100 points, they will receive the Lily Community Engagement Award. The student will be awarded with; a green LCEA honors cord for graduation (with a GPA of 3.25 or above), LCEA Certificate from the CSL, and an invitation to and recognition at the CSL's Annual Awards Banquet.

Students that earn over 200 points, are eligible to receive the LCEA with distinction. A student must first earn 175 points, then they will have the opportunity to complete a qualifying capstone project (required) to earn the final 25 points. As a LCEA with distinction recipient, they will be honored with the following (in addition to the previously listed recognitions); a purple LCEA with distinction honors cord (with a GPA of 3.25 or above), a commemorative accolade, and the opportunity to showcase your LCEA capstone project.

The LCEA has been developed to encourage students to participate in a wide range of co-curricular community-based opportunities.

Associated Goals

- Increase student's participation in community engagement opportunities within the greater WCU region.
- Encourage critical reflection among students on their variety of their community engagement experiences.

Review Tool(s)

- Number of students receiving LCEA
- Number of students receiving LCEA with distinction
- Number of programs/initiatives associated with points

Champion(s)

Center for Service Learning and Higher Education Student Affairs Master's Program Graduate Assistant.

Jacob Medford Fellowship Program (JMFP)

Jacob Medford Fellowship Program (JMFP) – The family of Jacob Spencer Medford, a WCU student from Marion who died in July 2002 from injuries received in a hit-and-run accident, contributed more than \$126,000 to endow a scholarship fund in his memory. The JMFP will provide five \$1,000 awards annually. The scholarship is intended for student leaders with an interest in continuing their leadership development and involvement in civic engagement. To be eligible for the scholarship, applicants must document significant previous involvement in community service activities, submit an essay on the importance of community service, and indicate a willingness to participate in service learning programs during fall and spring semesters.

The students selected to receive the JMFP scholarship will become fellows. The goal of the fellows is to develop the participants into servant leaders on WCU's campus and beyond. The fellows will have opportunities to develop as individuals and as a team and help foster an environment at WCU that promotes service, inclusion, and helping others.

Requirements of the fellowship program are: fellows must be enrolled full-time; have a 3.0 GPA; be active in community engagement; attend a fall weekend leadership retreat, participate in at least one student organization on campus, read and engage in a required leadership reading, and attend one leadership seminar per semester. Fellows will also be encouraged to participate in peer-to-peer mentoring, apply to present at the annual Whee Lead Conference, as well as seek out leadership roles within a student or community organization.

The scholarship and fellowship program are intended for student leaders with an interest in continuing their leadership development and involvement in civic engagement.

Associated Goals

- Medford Fellows will gain an understanding and be able to apply the servant leadership model both personally and professionally.
- Medford Fellows, as both individuals and a group, work towards advancing a culture of service among the Western Carolina region.

Review Tool(s)

- Number of Medford Fellows obtaining the Lily Community Engagement Award
- Number of Medford fellows attending semester leadership programs
- Number of Whee Lead conference presentation from Medford Fellows
- Number of Medford Fellows involved/holding leadership positions in student organizations

Champion(s)

Center for Service Learning and Higher Education Student Affairs Master's Program Graduate Assistant.

Critical Cultural Competence Certificate (CCCC)

Critical Cultural Competence Certificate (CCCC) – The CCCC will help students to develop an understanding and appreciation for their own identities and become critically reflective of their lenses in relation to other identities as defined by, for example, gender, class, sexual orientation and race. The certificate provides students with the foundation, knowledge, demeanor and skills to improve their ability to relate across differences in an increasingly diverse global setting.

The Critical Components are: The Foundations of Diversity and Inclusion, Queer Community, Mental and Physical Health, People with Disabilities, Global Perspectives, Military Experiences, and Spirituality, which are necessary for engaged 21st century citizenship.

The CCCC is set up to expose students to the aforementioned competencies. Each competency will have a dedicated workshop designed to expose, discuss, articulate, reflect on and manage implicit biases.

Students will be required to complete all competencies and a capstone project. For the capstone, students can choose an activity which requires them to engage with a community related to one of the competencies and develop a presentation about that experience.

The CCCC is designed to enhance students' complete university experience. They will focus on the academics of their specific programs while developing skills necessary to critically and competently engage as global citizens.

Associated Goals

- Engage students with diverse communities on and off campus.
- Enhance students' cultural responsiveness, leadership, and professionalism.

Review Tool(s)

- Number of participants
- Number of participants who complete it within 12 months
- Number of participants who complete it within 18 months
- Number of participants who engage in multiple projects
- Number of participants who volunteer to be mentors

Champion(s)

Office of the Chief Diversity Officer and Higher Education Student Affairs Master's Program Graduate Assistant.

Faculty Institute on Community Engagement (FICE)

Faculty Institute on Community Engagement (FICE) – Plan, implement, and evaluate a FICE. Framed by the relevant Campus Compact principles guiding the CAP, a FICE seeks to provide professional development activities focused on understanding and application of community engagement, networking, and leadership opportunities from faculty related to scholarship and teaching. The institute will recruit a faculty cohort of 15 participants. Professional development sessions will take place throughout the academic year with initial and capstone experiences at the Spring Civic Engagement Institute/Pathways to Achieving Civic Engagement conference. Pathways will exist for faculty working on a new or significantly revised community engagement project and for faculty focused on scholarly output connected to community engagement. In the first year, a team of faculty experienced in community engagement will plan the Institute to begin in the Spring semester; these faculty will serve as mentors for the first cohort. Some possible topics for the professional development sessions include defining service learning, course design, partnership development, diversity, and scholarly output. Faculty will develop and implement a Service Learning/Community Engagement plan or project. Outputs for the first year include: Institute Toolkit with workshop and evaluation plans; SLCE course designations/applications; and faculty scholarship. Stipends will be provided.

Integrated into the institute will include the creation of two Community Engagement Faculty Fellow positions, available through a competitive application process. Fellows should have significant experience with community engagement activities at WCU and demonstrated ability to work well with colleagues. The fellows will help plan the FICE, coordinate mentoring, and support scholarship efforts. Included will be incentives to fellows such as a stipend or course release.

Associated Goals

- Increase support for faculty interested in community engagement.
- Establish community engagement leadership roles for faculty.

Review Tool(s)

- Institute-related metrics including number of participants, professional development contact hours, number of faculty activities connected to community engagement (new projects, service learning course designations, presentations, publications)
- Professional development content analysis
- Number and type of mentoring activities conducted by Institute participants
- Survey and/or focus group for planning team
- Survey and/or focus group for Institute participants

Champion(s)

Center for Service Learning, Coulter Faculty Commons, Executive Director of Community & Economic Engagement, and the Faculty Fellows.

Conclusion

This plan has been designed to build on over a century of civic and community engagement with our region, and primarily focuses in on the efforts dedicated to student civic development. In this, we strive to prepare graduates who are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens of our democracy. We do this with a very long list of partners both on and off campus, in and out of our region and state, and across our nation as a whole. In this, universities do what we are qualified and called to do. We do what works best. That is, we plan, we clarify goals, we organize support and resources, we engage, engage, engage, and ultimately lean into and learn from our experiences and the collective experiences of others.





Center for
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