

## **Barry University**

### **STRENGTHENING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

#### **Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates Among College Students**

##### **I. Executive Summary**

This Action Plan for Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voting Rates Among College Students was developed by Barry University's Center for Community Service Initiatives (CCSI) and the Campus Democracy Project (CDP) Committee. A select group prepared the plan for submission as part of Barry's Voter Friendly Campus application. Members of the select group were Dr. Glenn Bowen, Executive Director of the CCSI; Dr. Jalane Meloun, Professor of Administration; and Dr. Sean Foreman, Professor of Political Science, Chair of the Department of History and Political Science, and Co-chair of the CDP Committee.

In support of Barry's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts, this Action Plan will be executed throughout the University, with the primary elements being implemented on and around Barry's main campus in Miami Shores, Florida. Some supplemental activities will take place at the Law School campus in Orlando and at other University sites in Florida.

Implementation of the Action Plan got underway at the start of the 2019–2020 academic year and will intensify in the run-up to the 2020 Elections. Submission of the Voter Friendly Campus Report will mark the end of the 2020–2021 phases of the Plan.

##### **II. Leadership**

The CCSI in the Division of Academic Affairs coordinates the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement and facilitates specific activities. The Division of Mission and Student Engagement (formerly Student Affairs) provides some support.

Dr. Sean Foreman and a student leader in the Barry Service Corps – Antonio Rodriguez in 2019–2020 and Isaly Ortiz in 2020–2021 – are the Co-chairs of the CDP Committee. Dr. Jalane Meloun, who has vast experience and expertise in the administration and promotion of democratic participation and engagement, is leading the Census participation and get-out-the-vote elements of the Action Plan. Functioning as a nonpartisan working group, the CDP Committee is charged with implementing the Action Plan. The CCSI facilitates the Committee's work as a strategic endeavor and monitors as well as evaluates the events and activities outlined in the Plan.

The CDP Committee consists of students, faculty, staff, and administrators from various divisions and departments. The President of the Student Government Association and the President of both the College Democrats and the College Republicans serve on the Committee, as do student leaders awarded fellowships by the national Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) and the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF). To amplify student

voice, a student-led initiative called BucsVote (Buccaneers is the nickname of Barry's athletic teams) is implemented as part of the CDP. BucsVote leaders, including three Barry Service Corps Fellows forming a Civic Health Team, participate fully in the work of the CDP Committee.

Faculty members from Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, and Social Work are involved in the work of the CDP Committee. Mid-level staff of Student Life, Housing and Residential Life, and Mission Engagement represent the Division of Mission and Student Engagement (Student Affairs).

The CDP Committee has worked closely with CEEP and has coordinated voter registration with the Miami-Dade County Elections Department as well as voter education with the League of Women Voters. Furthermore, the Committee has contributed to the University's participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

Committee meetings are usually held twice a quarter; monthly meetings are planned for the 2020–2021 academic year. Members of the Committee communicate regularly via email.

### **III. Commitment**

The leadership of the institution demonstrates commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement by approving the Strategic Plan for Civic Engagement with explicit goals for voter registration, education, and participation. University administration also approves an annual budget that makes provision for civic engagement programs and projects, and for participation in conferences, including the annual National Meeting on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. Occasionally, the Vice President for Mission and Student Engagement (chief student affairs officer) shares information on the civic learning and democratic engagement achievements with University administration.

University President Sister Linda Bevilacqua, O.P., Ph.D. (July 2004–July 2019) was an early signer of Campus Compact's 30th Anniversary Action Statement of Presidents and Chancellors in November 2015. This led to the development of Barry's Civic Action Plan in which the goal of implementing the CDP "more intentionally to deepen students' understanding of political issues" is articulated. Current president Mike Allen, Ph.D. will continue the institutional support for this campus commitment.

Barry's annual Community Engagement Symposium and the Annual Report of the Center for Community Service Initiatives are venues for sharing CDP-related information. Furthermore, during their presentations at local, state-level, and national conferences, and in meetings with legislators and local officials, administrators have communicated the institutional commitment to civic engagement and have highlighted the purposes and outcomes of the CDP.

There has been a sustained commitment to fostering civic learning and educating for democratic engagement on campus for almost a decade. Barry has participated in NAPSAs Lead Initiative on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement since its inception in 2012.

In addition to the Civic Action Plan (see above), the Strategic Plan for Community Engagement reflects institutional commitment to strengthening democratic engagement. Both the Civic Action Plan and the Strategic Plan are grounded in the University's core values of inclusive community and social justice.

Overall, Barry University intends that the civic, democratic, and/or political learning will foster civic-mindedness – the “inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community” (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011, p. 20).

The CCSI manages the formative and summative evaluation processes, which are designed to ensure that CDP outcomes are measured and met.

Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is not included explicitly in the general education curriculum; instead, elements of civic learning and educating for democratic engagement are incorporated in several social and behavioral science courses. Some of those courses have a service-learning component, with service activities that can enhance civic awareness and foster democratic participation.

Further, educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is mainly a co-curricular undertaking. Constitution Day events, Legislative Forums, Debate Watch Parties, and Student Debates are organized as part of the CDP. Moreover, the CCSI includes civic learning and democratic engagement as an integral component of the Barry Service Corps Fellows Program.

#### **IV. Landscape**

Civic learning and democratic engagement are not “overall campus learning outcomes.” Preliminary assessment data gathered by the CCSI show that the political climate on campus remains receptive to the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in the community, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and civic responsibility. In this regard, the CDP Committee cannot easily compare Barry's data with those of peer institutions.

Civic learning and democratic engagement is taught in POS 201: American Government, a course in the Department of History and Political Science. However, it is not listed as a learning outcome. As mentioned above, civic learning and democratic engagement are present in the CDP and the Barry Service Corps Fellows Program.

Limited funding has been a longstanding factor in the implementation of co-curricular programs at Barry; however, it has not had a significant impact on the CDP. In some years, the participation of student affairs staff has been less than desired or expected, which may be due in part to a relatively high turnover.

Barry's main campus is surrounded by low-income neighborhoods, where a large number of undocumented immigrants reside. The student population includes many first-generation college students, some with English as their second language.

Resources available to help the institution be successful include grants and student fellowships from national organizations and programs (e.g., the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Ask Every Student, Campus Compact, CEEP, and Up to Us). The CDP Committee will consider applying for some of the available resources to help the institution achieve success.

## **V. Goals**

The CDP Committee will pursue the following long-term goals:

- Empower an increasing number of students as advocates and leaders in civic learning and the democratic processes.
- Increase the number of students registered to vote.
- Increase the number of students who vote.
- Improve the civic learning outcomes of co-curricular events and activities.

The institution wants students to demonstrate and graduate with (a) knowledge of election systems and voting processes, (b) the ability to identify injustice and the courage to speak up, and (c) civic leadership skills. Over the next 10 years, the institution seeks to increase and deepen civic learning and democratic engagement.

The following short-term goals will be pursued:

1. Enhance current voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts.
2. Increase the campus voting rate from 57.5% in 2016 to 60% in 2020 and from 42.6% in 2018 to 50% in 2022.
3. Engage new (first- and second-time) voters in promoting democratic engagement.

## **VI. Strategy**

The CDP embraces the understanding that “incorporating democratic engagement into the collegiate experience creates structure and stability for students as they explore what their political beliefs are, and how they would like to engage in the democratic process” (Voter Friendly Campus program). Toward the end of the 2018–2019 academic year, the Committee began to consider the Voter Friendly Campus designation. In light of this, the decision was made to develop components of the required Action Plan even before submitting the Interest Form. The Plan would be completed and refined by May 2020 for submission; it would indicate the proposed implementation of new steps to encourage registration and voting as an ongoing effort up to Election Day. Below is a list of the planned activities.

- Voter Registration: Informational tables at which to promote voter registration during scheduled events for Constitution Day, September 17, 2019 and 2020; an event for National Voter Registration Day, September 22, 2019 and 2020; and a Census 2020 Forum, February 11, 2020. Also, regular “tabling” sessions throughout the Fall 2020 semester will be done in the Student Union by the CEEP Fellows, College Democrats, College Republicans, and the Bucs Vote students’ civic team.

- Voter Education: Nonpartisan information designed to educate voters on election processes, issues, and candidates, posted to the CDP website <<https://www.barry.edu/campus-democracy/>>. In addition, a CCSI-directed “Know Before You Go” campaign on social media aimed at keeping students informed about voting procedures.
- Voter Engagement: Students encouraged to participate fully in events such as the NBC 6 College Week in October 2019, Legislative Forums, and the Deliberative Dialogue Series (the latter designated as a “PSR” [personal and social responsibility] event as part of Barry’s Quality Enhancement Plan).
- Legislative Forums: Two Forums with state legislators for the Fall 2019 semester in the Student Union – the first with State Representative Dotie Joseph on September 25 and the second with State Senator Jason Pizzo on October 8. Forums with a county commissioner and other municipal leaders are tentatively scheduled for Fall 2020 on the main campus. The purpose of the Legislative Forums is to bring elected officials to campus for legislative agenda and issue-focused discussions and personal engagement. The student newspaper and radio station are expected to cover the Forums.
- Educational Forum on U.S. Census 2020: Given that an accurate census plays a key role in so many outcomes that impact the American citizen, the CDP Committee decided to organize and host an Educational Forum on the topic “Census 2020: Why Should I Care, Anyway?” The Committee also decided that a U.S. Census Bureau Train the Trainer and Census-Taker Recruitment Session should complement the Forum, scheduled for February 11, 2020 in Thompson Hall, a central building on campus.

CDP Committee members and CCSI staff will be responsible for implementing each planned activity. They will seek assistance from faculty/staff and student volunteers throughout the University.

Students form the main target group for all CDP activities. Some activities require intensive staff/faculty participation.

## **VII. Reporting**

This Action Plan will be posted at the CDP website. Elements of the Plan will be shared via University bulletins and in both Community Engagement News (the CCSI newsletter distributed internally) and Community Connections (the CCSI newsletter distributed externally, to community partners).

Data used to inform the plan will be made public through items in Community Connections and the CCSI Annual Report.

## **VIII. Evaluation**

The Action Plan will be evaluated to determine the extent to which the specific goals have been achieved. The institution wants to know whether the civic learning and democratic engagement

efforts have been successful and what should be done in succeeding years. The audiences for the evaluation are University constituent groups, including senior administrators.

The CCSI will carry out the evaluation after Election Day 2020, with a completion date before the December holidays. Survey data to be collected include voter registration data; self-reported voter/voting experiences will be recorded, and event participation information will be included in the evaluation. The performance measures and indicators of success include increased voter registration, informative voter/voting experiences, and increased event participation. (NSLVE data will not be available for inclusion in the Voter Friendly Campus Report.) Analysis will include comparing election year data, examining themes emerging from reported voter/voting experiences, and comparing event attendance numbers. The results of the evaluation will be shared in the Voter Friendly Campus Report and in CCSI/University publications.