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Dillard Votes: Dillard University Action Plan

Executive Summary

Dillard University, a historically Black institution, stands at the forefront of cultivating ethical leaders who are equipped to make a positive impact on the world. With its motto "Ex Fide, Fortis" (From Faith, Strength), Dillard attracts and nurtures the leaders, thinkers, and artists of tomorrow, providing them with the tools necessary to envision and create a better world for all. The university's commitment to civic engagement is deeply intertwined with its core mission and values, reflecting a holistic approach to education that goes beyond mere knowledge acquisition.

At Dillard, students are encouraged to develop not only academic prowess but also high ethical standards and compassion. This foundation prepares them for meaningful civic participation, as they learn to think critically and communicate precisely. However, Dillard's approach extends beyond contemplation; it emphasizes courageous action, inspiring students to transform their ideas into tangible realities that benefit society. The university instills in its students the importance of choosing the right path over the easy one, fostering a sense of integrity that makes their work resilient and inspiring to others.

Dillard's commitment to civic engagement is further strengthened by comprehensive student support systems. Programs like Student Support Services (SSS), which has been federally funded since 1976, play a crucial role in this endeavor. SSS provides academic support, counseling, and various workshops that not only promote student success but also prepare students for active citizenship. By focusing on building confidence and providing holistic support, Dillard ensures that its students are well-equipped to engage meaningfully with civic responsibilities.

Leadership

This initiative is being led by Dr. Courtney Williams, the Dean of Students & Chief Student Affairs Officer. In addition, we will be partnering with on campus and grassroots organizations such as our university's Center for Racial Justice which will assist us in understanding and working on the cultural and racial aspects of civic participation, the Criminal Justice department and department of Urban Studies as well as our Center for Student Engagement and Leadership help focus on the importance of democratic engagement specific to students. We also intend to work with some of our student organizations such as the university NAACP chapter, the Power Coalition, NPHC and other fraternities and sororities, student government and the royal court.

Commitment

Dillard University has been involved in a host of civic engagement work. As an institution



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committed to community service and engagement, every student is required to complete at least 120 community service hours in order to graduate. Additionally, all first-year students participate in a year-long, first-year seminar course which includes a 30-hour service-learning component.

We also have an office of Community and Neighborhood Relations which has been awarded several community development grants. The five focus areas of this office include (1) renter education and home ownership; (2) youth empowerment; (3) healthcare and neighborhood security; (4) financial literacy and budgeting, and (5) small business development.

Dillard also participates in the annual MLK Day of Service each January. Over 100 students go out into our local community to take part in community rebuild projects as well as work with elderly citizens of New Orleans.

Additionally, the Division of Business and Finance at Dillard University offers free tax services to the local community through its Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. The VITA program is geared to help moderate to low-income families (generally 40,000 or below), who have issues finding or preparing tax returns themselves. Certified volunteers receive the necessary training to prepare basic tax returns at no cost to you. In collaboration with the IRS, faculty and students have prepared over 200 tax returns, annually.

In recent months, students and student leaders have mobilized faculty and staff to advocate for several important issues including (1) redistricting across the state of Louisiana with The Power Coalition and Urban League of Greater New Orleans, (2) voter education for local, state, and national elections, (3) women's reproductive justice rights through the *In Our Own Voice Next Generation Fellows* internship, (4) launching the Center for Racial Justice focused on criminal justice reform, and (5) hosting a plethora of informational programs, guest lecturers, and classroom discussions about civic learning and democratic engagement.

Goals

By participating in this program, we'd like to

1. Develop, implement, and evaluate ways by which to institutionalize voter education and engagement on campus and turnout at the polls for local, state, and national elections.
2. Work alongside academic affairs to develop and deploy a cohort of 3 – 5 civic engagement interns with the official responsibility of promoting civic learning and democratic engagement on campus and within our Gentilly community.
3. Streamline and strengthen the work being done by civic organizations on campus including NAACP, Power Coalition, Andrew Goodman Foundation, Bleu Voter Society, National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, Center for Racial Justice, First Year Experience, and Student Success



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In the past, we've not had a campus-wide plan which left several departments to pave their own way. We would ideally like for this plan to assist us in formalizing civic efforts on both the co-curricular and academic side as well as allow for an opportunity to develop a tracking and assessment system.

Strategy/Timeline

Summer 2024: Democracy Fellows and SGA will work together to get in contact with partner organizations.

August 2024: Establish and convene a civic engagement taskforce – collaboratively decide ways in which will approach civic learning and democratic engagement on campus.

September / October 2024: Begin monthly (bi-monthly) meetings with taskforce. Begin hosting civic engagement educational events on campus including Student Involvement Fair; host special event targeted at first-year students.

November 2024: Host a civic engagement event during Homecoming

December 2024: Assess Fall semester; make plans for Spring semester

January 2024: Host MLK community-based event

February 2024: Host events connecting Black History Month and civic engagement

April 2025: Host civic engagement event during Spring Fest

Reporting/Evaluation

How will the plan be shared internally and externally? We will develop a newsletter to share this plan via campus-wide e-mail and social media. We will also work with Communications & Marketing to share the plan with external partners.

How will you know your efforts have been successful? We will develop assessment measures



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to evaluate success including student learning outcomes, satisfaction with programming, and participation in programs / initiatives.

What does the institution want to know? We want to learn more about our student's understanding of and participation in civic engagement initiatives.