

Dillard Votes: Dillard University Action Plan

Leadership

This initiative is being led by Dr. Courtney Williams, the assistant dean of students as well as by Mr. Caleb Roberson, program coordinator for career and professional development. In addition, we will be partnering with 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 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

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 2022: Democracy Fellows and SGA will work together to get in contact with partner organizations.

August 2022: Establish and convene a civic engagement taskforce – collaboratively decide ways in which will approach civic learning and democratic engagement on campus.

September / October 2022: 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 2022:** Host a civic engagement event during Homecoming
- December 2022:** Assess Fall semester; make plans for Spring semester
- January 2023:** Host MLK community-based event
- February 2023:** Host events connecting Black History Month and civic engagement
- April 2023:** 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 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.