

Action Plan to Increase Democratic Engagement

Goucher College
Spring and Fall 2018

Executive Summary

Stated alongside the mission of Goucher College is the ideal of an education that is “based on an expanding sense of community – a community where discourse is valued and practiced, where students attend small classes and interact closely with faculty and one another, and where students can participate in and lead extracurricular programs.”

This ideal education is the foundation for strong democratic engagement, and if when realized, develops responsible citizens who not only are democratically engaged, but who are equipped, “... to solve complex problems together with people who are not like themselves.” Goucher College values developing responsible and engaged global citizens, it is at the heart of what we do.

What follows is an action plan to ensure that Goucher College holds true to its ideals and mission. The plan is narrowly tailored to ensure democratic engagement is practiced, recognized, and valued by the campus community and is not intended to undermine or de-value other aspects of the college’s mission. The action plan, properly implemented, will support and re-inforce the core values of the college.

The impetus for issuing this plan now, is the upcoming midterm congressional elections and gubernatorial and state elections of November, 2018. While it is always the goal to have active engagement in state and congressional elections, this year in particular there are many issues of interest to students and many policies under consideration that could potentially affect the type of liberal arts education Goucher College offers. We believe raising an awareness and understanding of these issues is not just a civic responsibility, but an educational opportunity that has the likely benefit of increasing voting rates among our students.

The action plan also coincides with Goucher College’s themed semester of programming in the spring: community engagement. Not only will the College’s programming around community engagement support and reinforce our efforts, but some of the actions outlined in this plan will be using resources made available through the themed semester.

The plan has been developed by Nina Kasniunas, Arsht Professor in Ethics and Leadership; Cass Freedland, Director of Community Based Learning; and a team of students including Isadora Stern, Natalie Malinowski, Sam Anderson, Ridwan Lawal, and Zahir Mammadzada. The action plan presented here is intended to take effect January, 2018 and will remain in effect through the fall semester of 2018 although we intend for this plan to serve as a template for future short-term and longer term action plans.

Leadership

Nina Kasniunas, Arsht Professor in Ethics and Leadership and Associate Professor in Political Science is leading the efforts outlined in this action plan with the support of the following working group.

Working Group:

Cass Freedland, Director of Community Based Learning

Isadora Stern, student (will be abroad in spring 2018)

Natalie Malinowski, student

Sam Anderson, student

Ridwan Lawal, student

Zahir Mammadzada, student

James Williams, student (will be abroad in spring 2018)

Zoe Brown, student

The working group will be responsible for further developing democratic engagement actions and overseeing the implementation of this action plan. They will also be identifying and developing other students who have the interest and capacity to lead this type of democratic engagement work. Not every working group member needs to be involved with or support every component of the action plan – members will have different interests and motivations which collectively will serve to support civic engagement. It is the hope that in the identification and development of other students, the working group will be inclusive of and open to all interests and community members.

The working group will meet at least once a month for the months of: February, March, April, May, September, October, November, and December.

Actions Planned for Spring and Fall 2018

(tentative as events will be added as student leaders organize and plan)

January:

Nina Kasniunas will work with communications to find a place on Goucher College's website to post our voting data.

February:

Monday, February 12 Lecture and class visit by Alexander Heffner, Host of "The Open Mind," a 30-minute public-affairs PBS television show. His lecture, entitled "Civil Discourse in an Uncivil Age: The Quest for a Post-Partisan Citizenship," will explore truth, civility and the future of democracy. His day at Goucher will also include a class visit with a question and answer format.

Common Hour event on one of the Wednesdays (still to be determined) will feature a conversation with the campus community about student voting rates on campus and the ways in which different elements of the educational experiences at Goucher cultivate democratic engagement.

March:

The lead organizers of Jackson Cooperative will be on campus for three days to host workshops and visit classes to share their experiences of working on a cooperative economy in Jackson, MI. Professor Eric Singer is organizing this series of events.

April:

Workshop series on Community Organizing. Nina Kasniunas and Cass Freedland are working to develop a three-workshop series on campus for students to learn community organizing skills.

August:

Voter registration / absentee ballot tabling at student move-in.

September:

Second week of September: Goucher Votes! Voter Registration / Absentee Ballot drive. We will visit every First Year Seminar to speak with students; we will table from 11am – 1pm on Van Meter Highway and in the evenings from 5-6 in the dining hall. We will ask students to sign Goucher Votes! Voter pledge cards which will be delivered to their dorm rooms two weeks before the November election.

October:

A series of issue forums inviting students and faculty from a wide range of disciplines to address issues / public policies important to their work, underscoring the importance of participating in elections.

November:

Coordinate vans to drive students to the polls on Election Day and /or during early voting

Other actions that will be undertaken in spring 2018:

Nina Kasniunas will be completing a program review of Goucher College's Community Based Learning Program. Results of the program review will be incorporated into a more complete long term Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning which will be formally presented and published on Goucher College's website.

Natalie Malinowski, Sam Anderson, Ridwan Lawal, and Zahir Mammadzada are the student representatives for Project Pericles' Student Voices, Student Choices and will develop programming to support that, which also supports this initiative.

The Goucher Poll, which is a student run survey research center focused on Maryland politics will go into the field in February and again in September.

Our new Goucher Commons curriculum has Center-Paired-Exploration (CPE) courses at the core. The newly developed CPE courses will be offered for the first time in the spring. These courses are based on a problem based learning pedagogy where students will explore problems from an interdisciplinary perspective.