

Executive Summary

This Civic Action Plan formalizes existing initiatives across and throughout Middlesex College and extends those initiatives with deliberate planful new programming to further engage the college community in civic and democratic activity. It was developed by the Department of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships but encompasses work that spans the College community; the most significant accomplishments and goals herein reported have been constructed in partnership with the campus-wide Civic Engagement Subcommittee. The Plan spans two academic years (2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and both serves to document areas of growth as well as formalizes initiatives intended to move the needle on civic learning and democratic engagement. This is a critical time for our democracy and for our communities, and the Plan has been created with the timeliness of these imperatives at the forefront.

The mission of Middlesex College is to provide access to a quality, affordable education for a diverse population, to support student success for lifelong learning, and to strengthen the economic, social and cultural life of the community.

In accordance with our Mission and the supporting strategic goals, in particular those following,

Goal B. Middlesex College Focused on Students

Strategic Initiative #1: Employ engaged pedagogy and provide stimulating learning environments that offer multiple approaches to learning

Strategic Initiative #2: Develop curricular and co-curricular activities and opportunities that expose students to new opportunities and horizons

C. Middlesex College Engaged with Our Community

The basis of the Plan is derived from the Department of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships' 2019-2020 Strategic Plan which has been approved by the Dean and reviewed by the Civic Engagement Subcommittee.

Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Leadership

Middlesex College created the Department of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships and the position of Director, Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships in April 2019. Earlier that academic year in November 2018, the Civic Engagement Subcommittee was founded and chaired by two faculty members with the stated objective of connecting individuals on campus doing civically-engaged work in order to share ideas, successes, contacts and “spurring collaborative activities that support civic and community engagement and student learning”. In Fall 2019, the Director of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships joined the faculty members in co-chairing the Civic Engagement Subcommittee.

The Subcommittee spans the college community and currently includes:

Vice President, Institutional Advancement

Vice President, Academic Affairs

Faculty, History and Social Science

Faculty, English
Director, Student Life
Director, Library
Director, New Brunswick Center
Director, Perth Amboy Center
Coordinator, Experiential Learning & Civic Engagement
Coordinator, Student Life
Coordinator, Democracy House Center for Civic Engagement (vacancy)
Coordinator, Coordinator of Military and Veterans Services (vacancy)

Student voice is a vital perspective and one not originally included in the Subcommittee. Prior to the sudden pivot to remote operations, that topic was added to the agenda for discussion at the next meeting. That said, the student voice is always a driving one that guides our work. One example is the creation of the Juvenile Justice Reform Club. At the conclusion of a Fall 2019 course that included a service learning project with incarcerated youth at a juvenile detention center, our students expressed a strong desire and commitment to continue working with the incarcerated youth. In response, the Club was founded and thus provides the structure that allows that service to continue beyond the semester boundary.

In addition, we are planning to implement Stanford University's Hass Center for Public Service' *Pathways to Public Service and Civic Engagement* survey to assess both our understanding of and student "interests and pre-dispositions regarding approaches to social change: community engaged learning and research, community organizing and activism, direct service, philanthropy, policy and governance, and social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility." (<https://haas.stanford.edu/community/pathways-public-service-and-civic-engagement-working-group>) Originally planned for Fall 2020, the timing of the survey's administration will be evaluated as decisions about returning to campus vs. remote operations are revisited.

Evidence of **Commitment**

Beginning with the College's Mission and Goals Statements (Appendix A) as prepared by the College community and approved by the Board of Trustees, the theme of engaging our students with the community through a variety of programming and opportunities, including civic and democratically purposeful ones, permeates Middlesex College's aim. In addition to being woven into the fabric of the Mission and its supporting Strategic Initiatives, Middlesex College's administration founded the Department of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships to aggregate, document, motivate and guide civically-engaged efforts already in existence in many areas of the College as well as to spearhead new initiatives. As evidence of both the existence of significant work already underway and of the value of a central focal point for civic engagement, in October 2019 Middlesex College was named a NASPA LEAD Initiative Institution for the 2019-2020 year.

There is a history of democratic engagement at Middlesex College. One example is work of the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Club:

The Club's efforts in the voter registration drives started at Middlesex College in the

Spring 2004 semester. That year the efforts of our executive club leaders assisted the College, the Office of Student Life and the student body with the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) mandate. Our students have done voter registration at the Student Activities fairs at the start of each semester, at the College Center lobby during September and October and at the EOF office throughout the school year. (EOF Voter Registration, Appendix B)

Democracy House (DH), Middlesex College Center for Civic Engagement, was founded in 1995 and has been functioning ever since. In 2010, 2011 and 2013 it was named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. After residing in an academic department for several years, Democracy House was moved to report to Career Services within Student Affairs (Career Services became Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships in April 2019). Democracy House students commit to a minimum of 300 hours of community service each academic year at their assigned community partner site. Our DH program is affiliated with Bonner Foundation, one of the few community colleges within Bonner. In addition to the service commitment, DH Bonner leaders meet weekly as a cohort with the coordinator for leadership development, guest speakers and other programming. For those students who cannot make the commitment to DH in terms of service hours, the Volunteers in Action Club (founded two years ago) provides students the opportunity to participate in events and service projects to the extent that their family, work and academic obligations allow.

Further, in Summer 2019, Middlesex College became a member of Campus Compact and the New Jersey Campus Compact chapter (NJCC) <https://www.njcampuscompact.org/>. In November 2021, the Director, Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships was named to the Strategic Planning Committee charged with redefining NJ Campus Compact into a new entity: EngageNJ. We will be hosting the EngageNJ THRIVE Student Conference on February 26, 2022. Participation in national Campus Compact and NJCC/EngageNJ affords access to a substantial amount of research and resources as well as collaboration with member colleges across New Jersey.

Current Campus Landscape

Middlesex College's main location is in Edison, New Jersey with two urban centers, one in New Brunswick and one in Perth Amboy. Based on the percentage of Hispanic Latino students enrolled, we are a designated Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI). According to Middlesex College's Fall 2019 Fact Book, total enrollment was 11,151 comprised of 5,139 fulltime and 6,012 part-time students, the average age of students is 22.9 years. ([https://myMiddlesex College.middlesexcc.edu/institutionalresearch/wpcontent/uploads/sites/3/2020/01/factbook-2019-fall.pdf](https://myMiddlesexCollege.middlesexcc.edu/institutionalresearch/wpcontent/uploads/sites/3/2020/01/factbook-2019-fall.pdf))

In Spring 2018, Middlesex College participated in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Findings reported included the following demographical comparison data.

As per our CCSSE report, "compared to the CCSSE Cohort, Middlesex College boasts a diverse

student population.”

	Middlesex College	2018 CCSSE Cohort
White, Non-Hispanic	26.0%	50%
Hispanic, Latino	24%	15%
Black or African American	11%	4%
Asian, Asian American	14%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%	1%
American Indian or Native American	0%	1%
Other	9%	8%

At Middlesex College:

- 26.9% of respondents are non-native English speakers compared to 18.7% of the CCSSE cohort
- 52.7% of Middlesex College student respondents work 21 or more hours per week
- 31.7% care for dependents at least six hours per week
- 71.1% spend between 1-5 hours per week commuting to class
- 45% of full-time students receive need-based financial aid
- 24% of full-time students report household income less than \$30,000.

Although experiential learning and cooperative education have been embedded in many academic programs of study for well over 20 years, service learning is a relatively recent addition to the curriculum. However, the concerted effort of key faculty coordinators who themselves have significant experience in community service and service learning (SL) pedagogy have launched SL as a prominent academic offering <https://www.middlesexcc.edu/service-learning/>. In Fall 2021, the term “service learning” was replaced with “community-engaged learning” (CEL) to emphasize the engagement and not act of service. According to the University of South Florida’s Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships:

... one of the learning goals is civic engagement, intended to enhance students’ sense of personal responsibility to participate in the public realm to address current pressing social problems, and thus going beyond the academic or skill based goals of the course, and (3) it is based on a reciprocal relationship through which the activities are planned and implemented through collaboration with a community partner to meet the challenges identified by that partner.

<https://www.usf.edu/engagement/community/definitions.aspx>

Key to that effort – and its success and growth- is the training and support provided to faculty and adjunct faculty members who want to include SL within the content of their courses. In Fall 2017, three (3) courses offered an optional opportunity for service learning at a partner site selected individually by each student from a list of approved partners. By Fall 2019, that number grew to thirteen (13) courses and the SL is more likely to be a mandatory component of the course with a specific partner/project connected to the course outcomes. In Fall 2021, service learning courses were designated with the “-SL” section code to allow students to locate courses

with SL included; we have discovered that students who experience SL express the desire to continue their community involvement through continued enrollment in academic coursework featuring this form of integrated service

- ECO-202-SL1 Principles of Economics II
- ENG-0121S-SLAL1 Writing Skills for Col II -Sup
- ENG-121-SL English Composition I (3 sections)
- ENG-122-SL8 English Composition II
- ESL-077-01 Reading and Speaking Level 3
- MAT-123-SL1 Statistics I
- POS-201-SL60 U.S. State and Local Govt
- SCI-157-SL1 Introduction to Meteorology
- SCI-179-SL1 Climate Science
- SOC-121-1SL Introduction to Sociology
- SOC-121H-1SL Intro. to Sociology (Honors)

For Spring 2022, community-engaged learning designation replaced service learning; courses were designated with the “-CEL” section code to allow students to locate courses:

- ECO-201-CEL1 Principles of Economics I
- ECO-202-CEL1 Principles of Economics II
- ENG-0121S-CEAL3 Writing Skills for Col II -Sup
- ENG-121-CEAL3 English Composition I (2 sections)
- ENG-122-CEL1 English Composition II (3 sections)
- MAT-123-CEL1 Statistics I
- MAT-124-CEL1 Statistics II
- POS-201-CEL1 U.S. State and Local Govt
- SCI-155-CEL1 Intro to Geology

Goals and Strategy for Student Learning and Institutional Civic Culture

Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships

*“... working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”
(Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi)*

Mission

The Department of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships promotes a lifelong commitment to active citizenship and social responsibility among all students and members of the Middlesex College community in order to enhance students’ own academic experiences and career clarity while contributing to stronger communities and an ever more engaged College. The Department enacts programs and initiatives intentionally designed to engage students, staff, faculty and the Middlesex County community. Our mission is to:

- cultivate community-aware and civically-engaged students through volunteerism, service and experiential learning
- develop co-curricular service projects

- encourage civic leadership and community connections
- foster social responsibility and nurture a campus-wide civic ethos that is infused through academics and student affairs in order to promote understanding of our responsibility to our greater community
- promote students' personal, leadership and career growth including workplace skills and competencies
- collaborate across the College and local community to forge effective and mutually beneficial relationships.

2019-2020 Goals

Goal 1: Connect Middlesex College students with experiential learning opportunities to cultivate community-aware and civically-engaged students through volunteerism, service and experiential learning. (Middlesex College Strategic Initiatives A1, A2, B1, B2, C1)

Outcome 1: Increase the types of courses and number of course sections offering service learning (SL) in academic year 2019-2020.

Measure 1: Additional course sections offering SL and additional types of courses offering SL.

Update: In addition to adding more courses, the following activities have been completed this year:

- Courses with a mandatory service learning requirement are identified to students with the course section code designation of SL. This allows for a fully integrated service learning project, now more likely to be completed by the class cohort, that runs throughout the learning outcomes of the course.
- Faculty Handbook for service learning has been completed providing process and general information to further development of impactful service projects <https://www.middlesexcc.edu/service-learning/for-faculty/>
- A program of faculty/training requirements prior to authorization to include service learning into a course has been developed and offered by the service learning faculty coordinators.

Outcome 2: Develop a multi-year initiative focused on voting, voter registration and Census 2020 to educate and engage students in the importance of their voice in these processes.

Measure 2: By collaborating with existing organizations on and off campus (e.g. League of Women Voters), develop programming and events that will maintain momentum and engage students in these issues and/or work cooperatively in support of initiatives in these areas already planned by other departments or clubs.

Update:

- The Director, Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships serves on the Middlesex County Complete Count Committee for Census 2020
- In response to County outreach, an Middlesex College student recorded a Census2020 commercial in his native Gujarati https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_____

ijdvo9nh0&list=PLbN3SBMZ4LK7KCp2AKaSUKKxm36w9MjHp&index=3&t=0s

- We procured TurboVote from DemocracyWorks to provide students with critical voting information for local, state and national elections. Given that New Jersey recently approved electronic voter registration, TurboVote will allow our students to complete their registrations through the app.

Outcome 3: Empower students' civic leadership and professional development.

Measure 3: Provide a weekend leadership development/civic engagement experience for Democracy House Bonner Leaders in Fall 2019.

Update:

- In November 2019, students completed a 4-day weekend of service trip in Baltimore, Maryland where they cleared and planted a community garden, sorted baby clothing, cleaned and stacked books and served with a local church.

Outcome 4: Strengthen service learning outcome assessment by adopting standardized measures across all service learning courses/sections.

Measure 4: Identification of existing SL assessment tools/methodologies, review strengths/deficiencies of each and selection of a tool that will be incorporated into all SL course offerings as a standard for assessing the efficacy and impact of the learning experience.

Goal 2: Partner with employers and local organizations to provide leadership, career and employment opportunities to students and alumni while contributing to the viability of these community partners. (Middlesex College Strategic Initiatives A2, B2, C1)

Outcome 1: Create community partner reception to recognize and honor those who have participated in our programs or offered opportunities to students.

Measure 1: Community partners will share experiences and recommendations for addition collaboration, suggestions for program improvement and identify areas for additional pre-service training, ongoing support and/or joint initiatives to extend and measure community impact.

Update: The reception was scheduled for April 23, 2020 but was canceled due to COVID-19 when our campus closed in person operations.

Outcome 2: Market Middlesex College and our students/graduates to the local community in order to create pipeline of internships, apprenticeships and jobs in all career fields.

Measure 2: Increased availability of internships and other experiential career opportunities in CCN, job fairs and employer partnerships.

Update: ongoing

Outcome 3: Collaborate with community partners to provide leadership and advocacy development for Middlesex College students.

Measure 3: Host workshops, training, information sessions and programming

featuring community experts.

Goal 3: Foster social responsibility and nurture a campus-wide civic ethos that is infused through academics and student affairs in order to promote understanding of our responsibility to our greater community. (Middlesex College Strategic Initiatives B1, C1)

Outcome 1: Survey the College community to assess existing activities within the realm of civic engagement.

Measure 1: Survey results.

Update: postponed until possibly Fall 2020

Outcome 2: Implement Campus Compact tenets to strength/grow existing programs.

Measure 2: Completed Campus Civic Action Plan within one year of Middlesex College signing the Campus Compact Action Statement as a member organization.

Outcome 3: In partnership with Marketing Communications, update and develop Civic Engagement and Community Partnership functional webpages to inform students, the College community and members of the local community.

Measure 3: a) Redesigned webpages for career services-related functions housed within Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships.

b) New webpages for Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships functions and information.

Outcome 4: Partner with Middlesex College faculty and staff to identify opportunities for collaboration and teamwork to promote civic engagement.

Measure 4: Support, sustain, create and advertise initiatives that document an increasingly civically-engaged and aware Middlesex College community.

As each of these initiatives develops and grows, we continue to identify community partners with whom to collaborate. Our students are reading partners in afterschool programs in Perth Amboy and New Brunswick, work in a community soup kitchen in New Brunswick, partner with incarcerated youth in a local detention center, serve as mentors to high school students as part of the EMPOWER program, clean our communities, partner to provide specialized services (dental health, accounting and financial planning, financial literacy) and more. As our community partner collaborations mature and become more deeply entrenched, we have begun working the same partner across different programs and in different ways. For example, the *Middlesex County Center for Empowerment* started off as a general Democracy House partner for Sexual Assault Awareness Month (they approached us years ago looking for space and an audience) and eventually expanded to work with a few service learning classes. Now they are site for the DH Bonner Program and we work with them on a larger scale, offering space and resources for a variety of their initiatives and events. For example, we provided space for them to host a meditation workshop for survivors of sexual assault earlier this year, and they're currently planning a virtual Pride event in June with DH and Middlesex College's Student Life. This growing relationship demonstrates the College's larger commitment to true civic partnership and engagement beyond service-focused programming.

Middlesex County Center for Empowerment:

<http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/Government/Departments/PSH/Pages/Center-for-Empowerment.aspx>

Reporting: *Sharing Accomplishments and Action*

In Fall 2020, the survey of the College community's existing civic engagement activities (Goal 3, Outcome 1 above) will be distributed to faculty, staff, and adjunct faculty members through the College's Department of Institutional Research. Armed with the results, the Director of Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships, Institutional Research and the Civic Engagement Subcommittee will determine how to make information out of the collected data via a to-be-identified vehicle that enables all interested parties to access and update contacts, accomplishments, partners, initiatives and more. In addition, the information will be added to the College's assessment tool, TaskStream for reporting and broad accessibility. The goal of the information repository is to guide new initiatives, provide ready access to civic engagement data to the College administration, and identify gaps in our offerings where additional focus is required.

We also need information from our students. To that end, we intend to evaluate Stanford University's **Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement** tool in Fall 2020 as a vehicle to gauge interest areas and motivation of our students in order to further ensure that our initiatives and their interests align, and that we incorporate their interests in our ongoing planning.

In Fall 2019, we participated in the New Jersey Secretary of State's Ballot Bowl 2019 voter registration initiative as we did in 2018; the Secretary launched Ballot Bowl 2019 at our Mobilize Middlesex College Rally on September 17, 2019. As a result of club participation, service learning partnership with the League of Women Voters, support from the Office of Student Life and more, we finished 2nd in our Ballot Bowl 2019 division behind a larger 4-year public university. We were able to obtain voter registration numbers through these efforts but voting numbers are another matter. To that end, we have joined **NSLVE** and have procured Democracy Works' **TurboVote** <https://www.democracy.works/tools-for-voters> through the TECC (Technology-Engaged Community College) program in Spring 2020 for potential roll-out to our students in early Fall 2020.

When we joined Campus Compact in summer 2019, we committed to participating in the Campus Compact 30th Anniversary Action Statement of Chancellors and Presidents by completing and posting our Civic Action Plan within one year's time. This Action Plan will be shared with Campus Compact in accordance with our commitment.

Evaluation of *Impact and Progress*

In addition to assessment metrics utilized internally to assess program efficacy, there are several national standards that are applicable. As part of our continued work, we intend to borrow and/or

model additional assessments on these highly relevant standards in order to demonstrate to stakeholders that this Civic Action Plan and Civic Engagement and the Community Partnerships' Strategic Plan is making progress and reaching established goals.

We have established a goal of applying for the Carnegie Foundation's Classification for Community Engagement during its next open application cycle. The framework of that application will undergird our work and planning.

Utah Campus Compact has identified several other standards that are applicable:

For campuses committed to engaging with their communities, several frameworks can be useful. Barbara Holland's Levels of Commitment to Community Engagement provides a vision of the engaged campus in which engagement is fully integrated as strategy to accomplish the campus mission and goals. The elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification documentation framework can be used to help institutions identify specific strengths and areas for quality improvement as an engaged campus as you review your institution's community engagement commitments and activities. The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll recognizes higher education institutions that reflect the values of exemplary, impactful community service. Applying can be a useful learning process as campuses identify their work. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education has developed a specific set of standards that should be considered in developing Civic Engagement and Service-Learning Programs, as well. The Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University has developed a set of public service pathways that are useful in exploring different forms of community engagement. Finally, if engagement is included as part of the campus core themes for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and University a campus should develop specific community engagement benchmarks.

<https://compact.org/resource-posts/civic-action-plan-engagement-assessment/>

As stated previously, we already intend to evaluate Stanford University's **Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement** tool in Spring 2020 and will augment the results of our analysis with additional metrics to ensure we understand progress or lack thereof as well as impact and gaps for future programming. The cycle of assessment will be ongoing.

Finally given the import of the Fall 2020 election and the ongoing critical call for student involvement in the democratic process, we will create a series of events and outreach with the goal of 100% student voter registration and student participation in the voting process. Although that programming will be different depending on whether our students are on campus or not, the foundations of the planning is well underway including social media outreach and other marketing efforts, TurboVote rollout through new student orientation and our annual QuestionMart (tabling in every classroom building for the first week of the semester if we are back on campus), collaboration with the Library and faculty members on campus and asking clubs to fulfill their service obligation by coordinating with us on specific voting and voter

registration service initiatives.

Appendix A: Middlesex College Vision and Mission

Appendix B: New Jersey Ballot Bowl 2021

Appendix C: TurboVote 2021

Appendix D: Voter Registration Video: Men's Basketball Team

<https://youtu.be/uh0fOn4EvZ4>