

Oakland University Center for Civic Engagement
2018-2019 Action Plan
Strengthening American Democracy

Executive Summary

During the 2017-2018 academic year, Oakland University established its Center for Civic Engagement to:

- support efforts to enhance civic engagement and civic literacy;
- encourage student involvement in civic engagement and public policy through volunteerism, internships, and experiential learning;
- bring the campus and community together through non-partisan dialogue surrounding important issues of public concern; and
- promote research related to public policy to inform policy makers and the public.

The Center is the main avenue through which OU's efforts to increase civic literacy, political and community engagement and preparedness of students to be active in their democratic society.

The action plan for 2018-2019 was developed by the Center's Director with input from the Center's campus advisory board. It seeks to establish a course of action for the 2018-2019 academic year in the area of civic engagement on campus (as well as reaching out to the community) by leveraging the 2018 election cycle, which features a number of important elections and ballot initiatives in Michigan including a governor's race.

The components of the action plan will be carried out on OU's main campus during the course of the next academic year. It will be the responsibility of the Center director to implement the plan, with the help of student assistants and members of the Campus Advisory Board.

Leadership

The director of the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) will lead the work outlined in the 2018-2019 Action Plan. The director chairs the Campus Advisory Board as well as the External Advisory Board (this group features alumni and prominent members of the community). The Campus Advisory Board's role is to help implement the CCE's plans on campus; the External Advisory Board helps set the overall direction of the CCE in terms of ideas for events and is an important tie to the community.

The Campus Advisory Board is almost fully established. Members are from all parts of campus, with a few more to be added as of this writing. Included on the Board are faculty from disciplines such as communication, journalism, and political science; a student representative from our Student Congress; the head of our alumni office; and the chief research officer. Other faculty will be added from our professional schools over the summer. The group will meet as needed but the director will work with individuals from the Board to take advantage of their individual expertise.

In addition to engaging with the members of the External Advisory Board, the CCE will invite other groups to partner with our efforts. For instance, the League of Women Voters and the Center for Michigan feature prominently in our plans for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Commitment

The leadership at Oakland University including the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the provost and the president could not be more supportive of our efforts. The development of the ideas behind the CCE were generated over a lengthy process, but once the goals of the CCE were well defined there was great support. There has also been incredible support from others on campus who hear about the ideals of the CCE. Given that we have just established the CCE, there will be a bigger effort made in the fall to inform the campus of its work. We are also working to communicate with alumni and the local communities. For example, the CCE will be featured in the fall issue of OU's alumni magazine.

While educating students in the area of civic learning is not currently a part of institutional culture, it does happen. Civic engagement happens all the time on our campus whether people know it or not. Some might not call particular events civic engagement or recognize it as such, but it is there. An informal count by the CCE's director of campus events during the 2017-2018 academic year yielded roughly two dozen events and activities that could be categorized as civic engagement or civic learning. Not all civic learning or democratic engagement must emanate from the CCE; rather, the CCE, in addition to its own work, can support and help the cause of these other activities. For instance, a student group on campus held a workshop on writing to elected officials to advocate for policy change. In addition, the Theatre Department did a production of *Animal Farm* that featured a "talk back" with the audience that included the cast as well as students and faculty from political science and other disciplines. Both of those are great examples of civic engagement even though others might not identify it that way. Certainly a goal of the CCE is to deepen and expand the work in this area, but this will take time; any culture shift does.

We do not have a specific focus on democratic engagement in our general education curriculum. Students have course options that speak to this topic but it is not required. The CCE's plan is to use extra- and co-curricular events to enhance student learning. Down the road, the CCE would like to establish a certificate for students who, through attending and engaging with CCE activities, are certified as a "civically engaged student."

The institutional commitment to the CCE's work is found broadly in its four goals – student success, scholarship, community engagement and diversity. The CCE can contribute to and impact each of these areas. More importantly, our leadership sees this and has responded very well to the idea.

Landscape

The current democratic engagement landscape on campus shows mixed indicators. As noted above, there is currently no explicit goal, curriculum or learning outcome linked to civic and/or democratic engagement.

The activities of our students are also mixed.

According to our 2016 NSLVE report, 56.7% of students voted in the 2016 election. This is higher (by 6.3%) than the voting rate for all other institutions; but it was a slight decrease from 2012. We fall short of other institutions in terms of voter registration. However, there is excellent

participation from our students who are registered. Only about 70% of our students are registered to vote (lower than the rate for all other institutions); however, voting among the registered group was nearly 81% (higher than the rate for all other institutions). This is a reason for a focus on voter registration in our 2018-2019 activity. Once OU students register, they vote at high rates. There is a wide range of participation – we are not alone, I am sure – in terms of field of study. Engineering and some other professional fields saw much lower voting rates compared to others including history, education, and philosophy. There are also differences across gender as 73.5% of female students voted in 2016 compared to only 70.5% of male students. (As an aside, I had a recent meeting with one of our Honors College students who is interested in youth participation and we discussed some research questions related to these data that could shape his senior thesis.)

Our CIRP freshman survey data (using tab 1D which shows all respondents) also show some mixed indicators. For instance, fewer OU students engaged in activities including demonstrating for a cause, volunteering, voting in a student election or discussing politics compared to our peers. OU students were similar to our peer institutions in terms of publicly communicating an opinion about a cause and helping to raise money for a cause. OU freshmen rated themselves lower than freshmen at our peer schools in terms of being open to having their views challenged and an ability to negotiate controversial issues, but the overall percent who saw these as strengths was surprisingly high. OU freshmen also reported a lower importance, relative to freshmen at our peer schools, for activities including participating in a community action program, keeping up with political affairs, and becoming a community leader. OU students, however, are not different from students at our peer institutions in their forecasting of whether they will vote in an election. In addition, as the NSLVE data demonstrate, our students out-perform those on other campuses in this regard.

As noted, we currently do not have a requirement of any kind that would guarantee students encounter civic engagement in their curriculum. CCE would like to develop, in the longer term, a certificate that recognizes students' (and community members') civic engagement in co- and/or extra-curricular activities; a more ambitious goal would be to create a minor in civic engagement.

Barriers – internal and external – are, at this time, limited to CCE's newness. Given that we are just beginning our work in earnest, we will have to overcome a lack of familiarity on campus and off. We will work early on to build our name recognition (especially on campus) with different groups with the hopes of building relationships and expanding our capacity by bringing on other interested faculty, staff and students. Resources are important in any endeavor. We are working to identify funding sources including through philanthropy.

Goals

In the long-term, CCE would like to see:

- voter registration become a more regular initiative that is expected rather than an add-on;
- a voting precinct added to our campus;
- voter registration figures reach 65% in 2018 (this is based on the fact that in 2014, our registration rate was at 62.6%; we are assuming that it will be lower than in the 2016 presidential cycle again in this midterm year);

- voter participation reach 30% in 2018 and 60% in 2020;
- develop and institute a “civically engaged” certificate for students and community members based on attendance of and engagement with CCE events;
- create a culture where OU is seen as the “convener of conversations” around issues of public importance and concern.

In the next year, CCE would like to:

- register 500 students;
- work with the administration to formally launch the Center and better communicate our vision and activities to the campus;
- engage students in a series of events related to civic engagement;
- engage our surrounding communities in a series of events related to issues of public importance and concern.

Strategy

CCE has already planned a busy Fall 2018 semester.

September 4, 2018: New Student Convocation – CCE will work with the League of Women Voters and several student organizations to host a voter registration table at OU’s Welcome Week festivities alongside other student groups. This event will be held in our student center. We will begin to feature our student voting hashtag #OUVotes and use it through the election.

September 18, 2018: A Day of Engagement – CCE will partner with the Center for Michigan for a day-long event on civic engagement. We will have voter registration available all day at the Center for Michigan’s van; screen their documentary, “Michigan Divided,” for the campus community as well as have a discussion following; host a town hall meeting on a topic that is still TBD that will be for community members on and off campus. This event will be held in our student center.

September 25, 2018: National Voter Registration Day – CCE will again partner with the League and several student organizations for voter registration efforts. This event will be held in our student center.

October 9, 2018: The Last Day to Register -- We will have the Secretary of State’s mobile registration center on campus that whole day. This event will be held in our student center.

Mid-November 2018 – CCE and the Political Science Department will host “Campaign Roundup.” After each election cycle, Campaign Roundup brings practitioners from the world of politics (including pollsters, campaign finance experts and journalists who have covered the most recent campaign) to campus for a discussion about the election results and implications for governing in the next two years. It is an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and members of the surrounding community to gather to discuss the campaign, the results and what they mean going forward. This event will be held in our student center.

In the Winter 2019 semester (dates are TBD), the CCE will:

- host a feature event around an issue of civic engagement for both on- and off-campus community (the topic is TBD and could be finalized when our External Advisory Board meets at the end of May);
- host a workshop on “Contacting Your Representative” to provide students with best practices and tools that will help students more effectively advocate for policies in which

- they are interested;
- participate in OU Day at the Capitol (this is an on-going event that is run by our Office of Government and Community Relations and Student Congress); and
 - host other events of public interest as they develop (one of the goals is for the CCE to be nimble so as to be able to respond to public interest in a particular issue).

The CCE director will be the main person responsible for this work, but will be assisted by the Campus Advisory Board as well as some student fellows.

Reporting

This plan will be shared via email with campus leaders and posted to the CCE website. We will also work to turn this text version of a report into a more eye-catching presentation so that it can be more easily shared with those interested.

Evaluation

The CCE director will work with campus leadership to determine assessment targets. For some this is straight forward – How many students were registered in the month of September? How many students attended the Contacting Your Representative workshop? (or how many letters or emails were written? or how many issues were written about?). The CCE director will work with advisory board members and others to create outcomes that can be measured at events like Campaign Roundup.

For some information, we will have to wait for the next NSLVE reports.