

# **Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh**

## **Action Plan – December 2017**

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(ADP), in consultation with the ADO Executive Board.**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Who developed this action plan?**

The action plan was developed by the Executive Board of the UW Oshkosh American Democracy Chapter. The Board includes faculty and administrative staff.

### **What is this action plan for and what does it seek to accomplish?**

The action plan commits the ADP to planning activities that can be used to generate civic engagement on the UW Oshkosh campus. The major accomplishments sought are to (a) increase civic awareness on a range of local, state, and national issues and (b) increase voter registration for the 2018 midterm elections.

### **Where will this action plan be implemented?**

The plan will be implemented on the UW Oshkosh campus.

### **Why was this action plan developed?**

The plan was developed out of a sense that if we were to increase civic engagement and voter participation, a clear plan would help us get there.

### **When does this action plan start and end?**

The part of the plan designed to increase voting started in September of 2017 (the beginning of the Fall semester at UW Oshkosh) and will end after the November 2018 elections. Those parts of the plan that deal with the broad UW Oshkosh civic learning goals have no defined ending date.

### **How will this action plan be implemented?**

As regards voting activities, the ADP executive committee has agreed on a set of campus events (speakers and panels) that we will promote via social media and traditional announcements. We will also create an internship opportunity for students who wish to register voters and help with get out the vote efforts.

## **Leadership**

### **Who (individual and/or office) is coordinating and overseeing the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement?**

The UW Oshkosh American Democracy Project (ADP) is coordinated and overseen by the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor. The Associate Vice-Chancellor to whom ADP reports is Dr. Charles Hill ([hill@uwosh.edu](mailto:hill@uwosh.edu) 920-424-3190)

### **Who is chairing the working group?**

The working group is chaired by Dr. Tony Palmeri ([palmeri@uwosh.edu](mailto:palmeri@uwosh.edu) 920-203-9749)

### **What is the role of the working group?**

The working group plans, seeks funding for, and promotes civic engagement activities.

### **How will working group members be selected?**

Associate-Vice Chancellor Hill is a member of the working group by virtue of his position. All other members serve voluntarily. Membership currently includes two professors of Communication Studies, two professors of Political Science, a professor of Criminal Justice, a professor of Education Leadership, the General Education Program Civic Engagement Coordinator, and a representative from the campus union (helps to coordinate room reservations for events).

### **What are working group members' responsibilities?**

Each member of the working group is responsible for brainstorming civic engagement ideas for the campus, helping to recruit panelists/speakers, helping to recruit student interns, and helping to promote events. Vice-Chancellor Hill is responsible for managing budgetary needs.

### **How is the working group inclusive of different campus and community stakeholders?**

The working group invites all members of the campus community to be part of the American Democracy Project. In 2016 we had students serve on the working group, but due to scheduling conflicts have not been able to solicit student help at this point. When events are created we invite the entire campus and surrounding community to participate.

### **Who are the working group members and how are they involved?**

\*Dr. Charles Hill, Associate Vice-Chancellor. Helps plan events and is responsible for managing budget issues that arise.

\*Dr. Tony Palmeri, Professor of Communication Studies. Chair of the working group. Responsible for chairing meetings, helping to plan activities. and working with the Vice-Chancellor's staff to promote activities.

\*Dr. Jennifer Considine, Associate Professor of Communication Studies and immediate past-chair. Responsible for helping to plan and promote activities.

\*Dr. David Siemers, Professor of Political Science. Responsible for helping to plan and promote activities.

\*Dr. James Krueger, Associate Professor of Political Science. Responsible for supervising voter registration student interns. Also helps to plan and promote activities.

\*Dr. David Jones, Professor of Criminal Justice. Responsible for helping to plan and promote activities.

\*Professor Courtney Bauder, Instructor of Educational Leadership and Director of the Campus Social Justice Program. Responsible of helping to plan and promote activities.

\*Mr. Mike Lueder, General Education Program Civic Engagement Director. Responsible for helping to plan and promote activities.

\*Ms. Nicole Bellcorelli, Program Advisor for Civic Engagement in the campus Reeve Union. Responsible for helping to plan and promote activities and reserving rooms in the Union.

### **How often will the working group meet?**

The working group has one official meeting per semester due to heavy teaching loads and other professional/scholarly/service responsibilities of each member. However, we have much online interaction BEFORE and AFTER each meeting so that in a real sense we "meet" quite frequently.

## **Commitment**

**How does the institution and its leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement? Is there an explicit, visible commitment on the part of the governing board, president/chancellor, and senior leadership?**

Institutional leaders have been highly supportive of the American Democracy Project. Even in difficult budget times, they have allocated funds to support bringing high quality speakers to campus. In the last five years the campus general education requirements were revised to include a much more prominent role for civic engagement, including the appointment of a full-time civic engagement director who reports to the Provost.

The commitment to civic engagement is clearly communicated internally; campus publications and social media platforms alert the entire community to civic campaigns taking place. Externally, UW Oshkosh has developed a brand as a place where civic engagement is a critical component of undergraduate education. Campus promotional materials give the civic focus prominence.

**Is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement a pervasive -part of institutional culture? Is it ongoing, consistent, systematic, and sustainable across programs, departments, and the entire institution? How do you know?**

The answer is YES. Some ways we know:

\*UW Oshkosh is one of the few campuses in Wisconsin that actually has a polling location ON the campus on election day.

\*Campus professors from a variety of departments are regularly called on to serve as commentators on civic issues for local and state media.

\*EVERY student on campus must participate in some kind of civic engagement service activity as part of their general education experience. Many fulfill that requirement by providing volunteer hours at a range of nonprofit and other service agencies. Such participation was made possible through the reform of general education that had the support of the upper administration, faculty and academic staff senates, and the student senate. The wider community now recognizes the campus as being completely engaged in the effort to make the wider community a better, more just place for all residents. For more information about the UW

Oshkosh general education program (called the University Studies Program) visit this link:

<https://usp.uwosh.edu/community-engagement/>

**How is the institution’s commitment reflected in existing statements and documents (e.g., mission statement, vision, core values, strategic plan)?**

The UW Oshkosh Mission Statement says in part, “The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh provides a high-quality liberal education to all of its students in order to prepare them to become successful leaders in an increasingly diverse and global society. Our dedicated faculty and staff are committed to innovative teaching, research, economic development, entrepreneurship and community engagement to create a more sustainable future for Wisconsin and beyond.”

For more information visit this link: <http://www.uwosh.edu/about-uw-oshkosh/mission-vision-and-core-values.html>

**What are the institution’s overall civic, democratic, and/or political learning outcomes? Is there a process in place to ensure that outcomes are measured and met?**

UW Oshkosh prepares graduates who are talented, liberally educated, technically skilled global citizens and are fully engaged as leaders and participants in civic, economic, political and social life. The University fulfills its learning mission through a commitment to providing a 21st century liberal education that is grounded in a set of student learning outcomes unanimously adopted by the Faculty Senate on May 13, 2008.

Specific outcomes related to responsibility as individuals and communities:

- Knowledge of sustainability and its applications
- **Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global**
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Developed through real-world challenges and active involvement with diverse communities

For more information visit this link: <https://usp.uwosh.edu/community-engagement/>

**How is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement included in the general education curriculum?**

The UW Oshkosh University Studies Program requires all students to reflect on three “signature questions”: How do people understand and engage in community life? How do people understand and bridge cultural differences? How do people understand and create a more sustainable world? Discussion and debate about these three questions occur in virtually all

general education courses. As part of their general education requirement, all students must complete a “Quest III” experience. In Quest III courses students extend their classroom into a community setting, working with a local non-profit, community group, or campus partner. This experience allows the student to apply their classroom learning to a real world, practical experience, and then return to the classroom with a higher proficiency. Community Partners include:

- Growing Oshkosh
- Habitat for Humanity
- Oshkosh Area Community Pantry
- Local farmers, local schools, veterans, and multicultural groups

## **Landscape**

### **Are civic learning and democratic engagement overall campus learning outcomes?**

Yes. Civic knowledge and engagement – globally and locally – is an overall campus learning outcome.

### **What does assessment data show about the political climate and democratic engagement on campus? How does this data compare to that of peer institutions?**

The last time UW Oshkosh students participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was 2014. At that time the results indicated that we trailed most of our peer comprehensive institutions in Wisconsin in terms of students’ perception of their civic engagement. Those findings gave powerful impetus to general education reform. Consequently, the current general education program (University Studies Program) is deeply infused with civic engagement learning outcomes. Because the program is relatively new, we do not yet have reliable data from which to make firm claims about the impact of the program on civic engagement and democratic engagement.

Anecdotally, faculty sitting on the American Democracy Project working group all agree that the number of engagement activities on campus has increased dramatically, in large part because of the University Studies Program.

### **How is civic learning and democratic engagement present in the curriculum?**

In the UW Oshkosh general education curriculum (the University Studies Program) in the spring of 2018, the following courses will have civic learning and democratic engagement components (civic engagement is a learning outcome in all of them):

**Business 259 – Predictably Misbehaving Behavioral Economics and Society**

**English 210 – Classical and Medieval Literature**

**English 212 – British Literature II**

**History 110 and 210– Topics in the History of Modern Civilization**

**Music 110 – Music, Ethics and Community**

**Philosophy 104 – Ethics**

**Political Science 105 – American Government and Politics**

**Communication Studies 111 – Introduction to Public Speaking**

**How is civic learning and democratic engagement present in the co-curriculum?**

Most departments in the College of Letters and Science include some kind of civic learning and democratic engagement component in their programs. There is also a Social Justice minor which focuses almost exclusively on democratic engagement. For more information visit this link:

[http://www.uwosh.edu/social\\_justice/](http://www.uwosh.edu/social_justice/)

**What internal barriers (e.g., limited funding, staff resistance, lack of leadership) prevent the institution from being successful?**

Funding is a huge issue. Most departments have limited release time available to provide for faculty and staff most qualified/motivated to mentor students in civic engagement activities. When faculty do get involved with students in civic engagement activities, such activities are generally labeled as “service” and thus receives less institutional rewards than scholarship or classroom teaching excellence. Thankfully the general education program does have a civic engagement coordinator, and the person occupying that position does an excellent job of leading faculty and staff to activities that are doable given the time constraints.

**What external barriers (e.g., election laws, voter ID laws, lack of proximity to polling location) prevent the institution from being successful?**

Wisconsin now has the most restrictive voter ID law in the nation. Additionally, the state government has made many public attempts to shift the mission of the University of Wisconsin from community engagement to concern purely with job skills and employment. As a consequence, faculty and staff who believe they are operating in the best tradition of the academy by inspiring students to lives of civic engagement are often made to feel like they are somehow doing something “radical” that could harm their careers.

**What resources are available to help the institution be successful?**

Through a system of segregated fees, UW Oshkosh is able to support a range of student groups that have a civic learning focus. Thanks to the fee system, student organizations are able to bring speakers to campus, prepare literature, and (for some organizations) help with get out the vote



efforts. The city of Oshkosh also has a polling station on the campus, which makes it much easier for students who live on campus to vote.

**What additional resources are needed to help the institution be successful?**

Currently, the Vice-Chancellor overseeing civic engagement is charged with overseeing a range of additional matters. Having a person at that level who deals exclusively with civic learning matters would be of great help. However, we do not see that happening at any time in the near future.

## **Goals**

### **Long Term Goals**

#### **What Impact Is Desired?**

\*Increase voting rates on campus by 10 percentage points from 2018 – 2024.

\*Increase the number of students participating in community engagement activities.

#### **What does the institution want to accomplish over the next 10 years?**

The civic learning portion of our general education program is unique among public, comprehensive universities. We want that portion of our program to become a more recognized part of the UW Oshkosh brand; we want to be recognized as a national leader in making civic engagement a central part of the education of every student.

### **Shorter Term Goals**

#### **What does the institution want to accomplish in the next year or two? What needs to be accomplished in order to move towards the achievement of long-term goals?**

\*We want to aggressively register students to vote in the 2018 midterm elections.

\*We want to support at least 10 highly qualified student interns to lead the registration effort.

\*We want to continue to promote civic engagement across the curriculum.

## **Strategy**

### **Long Term:**

\*Assess the effectiveness of the University Studies Program and continue to improve based on data collected.

\*Assess the effectiveness of civic learning components in individual academic departments.

\*Create more institutional rewards for faculty and staff engaged in extracurricular civic learning activities that benefit students.

\*Participate actively in NSSE and other surveys of student engagement.

### **Short Term:**

1. On November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 we had a campus forum on "Gerrymandering in Wisconsin: The Issues Before the Court." Jay Heck, the Executive Director of Common Cause in Wisconsin, was the featured speaker. Before and after his talk, we sent around a sign-up sheet for students who thought they may want to get more involved in activism in 2018. Approximately 100 students attended this event, and more than 20 expressed an interest in future activism.

2. In February of 2018 we will be holding another campus forum. This one is called "Donald Trump: One Year Later." A panel of speakers from different points of view will assess the Trump presidency. At this event we will again give interested students an opportunity to sign up for more involvement.

3. Based on the interest expressed in the November 28 and February events, plus additional campus announcements, a political science professor will recruit 10-20 interns who will be responsible for voter registration and other get out the vote activities for 2018.
4. On March 7th, 2018 we have our annual "Campus Conversations" event. The way we are going to do it this year is to have representative of student partisan groups (College Democrats, College Republicans, and College Libertarians/College Greens if they have recognized organizations at the time) facilitate table conversations about how their party addresses issues of concern to the campus community. We usually get 100-200 students to attend this event, so it will be a golden opportunity for the partisan organizations to attract members. Most important, the interns will be at this event to register everyone in attendance not already registered to vote.
5. In September of 2018 we will have our annual Constitution Day lecture. We have not decided on a speaker yet. However, it will probably be someone who can speak to the issues at stake in the November 2018 elections. At this event we will actively engage in registering students to vote.

## **Reporting**

The plan at this point will only be shared among members of the American Democracy Project Executive Board. We do not have plans for public dissemination. From our perspective, the main value of the plan is to help focus our goals and keep us accountable among ourselves as a Board. More extensive public dissemination could put us in the position of having to defend our strategies, thus taking us away from [what we feel] is the more valuable action of promoting the activities listed in the strategy.

## **Evaluation**

Civic learning outcomes of our general education program are evaluated with tools created by the campus' Office of Institutional Research. The data collected will be studied by the University Studies Program administrative staff, and then shared with academic departments, upper administration, the Faculty and Academic Staff Senates, and the Student Senate. Representatives of each of those units will be called on to help make improvements to the program based on what the data show.

We do not yet have good evaluation tools to determine the effectiveness of our short term strategy activities. For example, we currently do not ask students who attend invited lectures to

fill out any kind of survey to let us know what they thought of the event. In the next year we will hopefully rectify that situation.