

Metropolitan State University of Denver
2017 Civic Action Plan

March 29, 2017

MSU Denver is pleased to submit its Civic Action Plan in response to President Stephen Jordan's signing in 2016 of the Campus Compact Civic Action Statement. This plan is the product of a committee of faculty and staff that convened specifically for the task of completing it. MSU Denver has a well-established record of commitment to community engagement and civic learning. Our intention with this plan is to accelerate and deepen that institutional commitment. Implementation of this plan will ready the University for its 2020 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.

The plan's objectives, in chronological order, include:

Establish a University Civic Engagement Committee charged in part to identify gaps and create an action plan for addressing them.	Spring 2017
Establish an updated visual representation of civic engagement at MSU Denver in order to clarify the goal of institutionalizing civic ethos, civic literacy, and civic inquiry.	Summer 2017
Leverage the ongoing work of the American Democracy Project, the Applied Learning Center, Student Engagement and Wellness, D-Phi, and elsewhere to enhance the value and visibility of what is already happening at the University.	Fall 2017
Identify champions of a civic ethos and the resources/hubs that will help align academic programs to the mission of civic and democratic engagement.	Fall 2017
Determine who is responsible for assessment of civic engagement outcomes and how findings are shared and used for improvement.	Fall 2017
Build upon existing practices and design new protocols to ensure comprehensive assessment.	Fall 2017 to Spring 2018
Tie assessment to University and General Studies learning outcomes as appropriate.	Ongoing
Determine a solution to creating an inventory of partnerships and their impact.	Spring 2018
Partner with University leadership and Marketing and Communications to ensure that civic engagement is a critical component of MSU Denver's engagement with the community.	Ongoing
Provide opportunities to reflect on and celebrate successes.	Ongoing

By following the timeline above, MSU Denver will undertake an inclusive process toward achieving the four recommendations made in *A Crucible Moment* (2012), which are to:

- Foster a **civic ethos** across all parts of campus;
- Make **civic literacy** a core expectation for all students;
- Practice **civic inquiry** across all fields of study;
- Advance **civic action** through transformative partnerships.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mark Potter
Associate Vice President, Undergraduate Studies

Introduction

Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) embraces its role in preparing students both for democratic engagement and for the jobs of the twenty-first century. Many MSU Denver students are engaged in the community, either through their coursework or through involvement in co- or extra-curricular activities. With this plan, MSU Denver seeks to broaden and deepen the institution's commitment to civic and democratic engagement.

Civic and Democratic Engagement

Leaders from across business, political, and educational sectors have called upon colleges and universities to educate students for citizenship as well as for careers (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). These two objectives of higher education are highly compatible. The knowledge and skills that are necessary for effective civic engagement align closely with the competencies that employers seek in new hires. These include communication skills, perspective-taking (the ability to understand problems or issues from the perspective of someone from a different background or viewpoint), and the ability to work across differences to solve problems.

Furthermore, our democratic political system is in continuous need—now, perhaps more so than ever—of recharging. For several decades, Americans have withdrawn from public spaces, such as labor halls and rotary clubs, into private spheres. Now, individuals are far less likely to interact on a regular basis with others from differing backgrounds or political leanings (Putnam, 2001). Face-to-face interaction has been supplanted in many instances with online forums where standards of civility and a serious desire to bridge differences and address shared challenges are lacking. In the face of these trends, the responsibility for cultivating the skills of democracy rests in large part with colleges and universities. As stated in *A Crucible Moment* (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012):

Higher education in a robust, diverse, and democratic country needs to cultivate in each of its graduates an open and curious mind, critical acumen, public voice, ethical and moral judgment, and the commitment to act collectively in public to achieve shared purposes. In stark contrast, higher education in a restrictive, undemocratic country needs only to cultivate obedient and productive workers (p. 10).

Lastly, today's students will spend their adult lives in a globally diverse society confronting significant challenges such as climate change, growing economic inequality, and racial, ethnic, and religious divisions. Experts alone cannot solve these problems. In a strong democracy, communities of diverse perspectives are engaged in framing the problems and identifying solutions to challenges on local, national, and global scales (Levine, 2013).

Education for democracy is thus an imperative for higher education, and to that end this plan establishes MSU Denver's goals for ensuring civic engagement in both undergraduate and graduate education.

Themes and definitions

For this Civic Action Plan, we follow the framework for a civic-minded campus that is found in *A Crucible Moment* (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). The key recommendations in that call to action are to:

1. Foster a **civic ethos** across all parts of campus;
2. Make **civic literacy** a core expectation for all students;
3. Practice **civic inquiry** across all fields of study;
4. Advance **civic action** through transformative partnerships.

We also use the Carnegie Foundation's definition for **community engagement**:

Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good ("Community Engagement Classification," n.d.).

Civic engagement occurs when students are actively engaged with differing perspectives in addressing common problems that affect the well-being of communities, the nation, and the world. As stated in *A Crucible Moment* (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012),

Today's education for democracy needs to be informed by deep engagement with the values of liberty, equality, individual worth, open mindedness, and the willingness to collaborate with people of differing views and backgrounds toward common solutions for the public good (p. 3).

Civic engagement outcomes encompass knowledge, skills, and disposition, as captured in the following outcomes. Students who engage with civic learning will be able to:

- Articulate a sense of responsibility and personal commitment to addressing global and local challenges.
- Demonstrate skills of influence and action, including persuasion, appropriate contacts, and understanding organizational arrangements.
- Demonstrate skills of communication and leadership, including taking responsibility for group outcomes, processes and products; speaking publicly.
- Demonstrate skills of political analysis and judgment, including the ability to weigh pros and cons as well as take trade-offs into consideration.
- Demonstrate skills of teamwork and collaboration, including managing conflict and navigating diverse positions (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007).

Civic engagement is the focus of MSU Denver's Civic Action Plan. By addressing the four civic themes (civic ethos, civic learning, civic inquiry, and civic action), it is our intention to strengthen MSU Denver's

commitment to civic engagement and ready the University for the 2020 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification process.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Identify and address gaps in policy, practice, and infrastructure that are preventing the institutionalization of a civic ethos, civic literacy, civic inquiry, and civic action across all parts of the University.

Objective(s):

1. Establish a University Civic Engagement Committee charged in part to identify gaps and create an action plan for addressing them. (spring 2017)
2. Identify champions of a civic ethos and the resources/hubs that will help align academic programs to the mission of civic and democratic engagement. (fall 2017)
3. Establish an updated visual representation of civic engagement at MSU Denver in order to clarify the goal of institutionalizing civic ethos, civic literacy, and civic inquiry. (summer 2017)

Goal 2: Strengthen assessment practices to be able to document impact on students, on faculty, on the community, and on the institution.

Objective(s)

1. Determine who is responsible for assessment of civic engagement outcomes and how findings are shared and used for improvement. (fall 2017)
2. Build upon existing practices and design new protocols to ensure comprehensive assessment. (fall 2017 and spring 2018)
3. Tie assessment to University and General Studies learning outcomes as appropriate.
4. Determine a solution to creating an inventory of partnerships and their impact. (spring 2018)

Goal 3: Enhance the visibility of civic engagement at MSU Denver.

Objective(s):

1. Leverage the ongoing work of the American Democracy Project, the Applied Learning Center, Student Engagement and Wellness, D-Phi, and elsewhere to enhance the value and visibility of what is already happening at the University. (fall 2017)
2. Partner with University leadership and Marketing and Communications to ensure that civic engagement is a critical component of MSU Denver's engagement with the community. (ongoing)
3. Provide opportunities to reflect on and celebrate successes. (ongoing)

Sources:

Colby, A., Beaumont, E., Ehrlich, T., & Corngold, J. (2007). *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement* (1 edition). San Francisco : Stanford, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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Putnam, R. D. (2001). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (1st edition). New York, NY u.a.: Touchstone Books by Simon & Schuster.

The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. (2012). *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.