

SIMPSON COLLEGE

Civic Action Plan May 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Simpson College Civic Action Plan seeks to integrate engaged teaching, engaged scholarship, community partnerships, and institutional action into a coherent framework to advance the public purposes of higher education. The plan includes a broad range of action items designed to promote community partnerships, prepare students for lives of engaged citizenship, strengthen communities, challenge inequalities, and set high expectations for achieving goals. Major aspirations identified in the plan include:

- Successfully roll out a new online service tracking and placement system that will enable students to more easily identify service opportunities and report their hours.
- Secure a stable, ongoing source of funding for student internships that promote service and civic engagement.
- Nurture student relationships with partner organizations that may continue after graduation and lead to a range of volunteer service and professional opportunities for alumni.
- Achieve full annual participation in Simpson's Wesley Service Scholar (WSS) program through enhanced recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Expand Simpson's annual Undergraduate Research & Creativity Symposium to include other high-impact learning experiences in volunteer service, study abroad, and internships.
- Work with Simpson's new honors program to incorporate more civic engagement opportunities and service-learning elements into student experiences.
- Continue to increase the voting participation rate of Simpson students in future election cycles.
- Increase the number of faculty members and academic departments that incorporate service learning into syllabi.
- Expand the number and depth of partnerships with student organizations that already support and engage in community-focused projects.
- Encourage and enable faculty members to expand syllabi to include more critical examination of social and economic inequalities.
- Develop sufficient endowment funds to provide more financial assistance to low-income students.
- Examine and incorporate elements of the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model.
- Successfully implement an annual service focus area.
- Utilize metrics to better gauge student participation.
- As part of future curriculum revisions, explore the possibility of requiring experiential learning or other high-impact practices which could include service learning, internships, study abroad, leadership positions, or undergraduate research.

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INTRODUCTION

In celebration of the 30th anniversary of Campus Compact in fall 2016, Simpson College President Jay K. Simmons joined hundreds of colleagues nationwide in reaffirming a shared institutional commitment to the public purposes of higher education. This reaffirmation included a pledge to create ambitious Civic Action Plans to chart a preferred future of expanded civic engagement. The statement signed by President Simmons and other presidents of Campus Compact member institutions included the following commitments:

“We choose to articulate the public purposes of the institutions we lead. We choose to deepen the work of our campuses by ensuring that our teaching, research, and institutional actions contribute to the public good. And we choose to work together to accelerate the pace of change commensurate with the local, national, and global challenges we face. For while we compete for students, for funding, and for victories on the athletic field, when we act in the civic realm we act in concert, speaking with one voice to make the case for the contribution of higher education to the public good.”

“These are commitments we make to each other with a recognition that our goals for a thriving and sustainable democracy cannot be achieved if we act alone—and that they cannot be denied if we act together. Our success over the last thirty years gives us confidence that we can build a world in which all students are prepared for lives of engaged citizenship, all campuses are engaged in strong partnerships advancing community goals, and all of higher education is recognized as an essential building block of a just, equitable, and sustainable future.”

“Our Civic Action Plans will state the actions our campuses will take as we move forward with a renewed sense of urgency, along with the impacts we expect to achieve. Our Civic Action Plans will be shared publicly, as will our assessments of the progress we are making in achieving the goals stated in the Plans.”

“To advance the public purposes of higher education, we affirm the following statements, which characterize our current commitments and name the ideals toward which we will work with renewed dedication, focus, and vigor:

- We empower our students, faculty, staff, and community partners to co-create mutually respectful partnerships in pursuit of a just, equitable, and sustainable future for communities beyond the campus—nearby and around the world.

- We prepare our students for lives of engaged citizenship, with the motivation and capacity to deliberate, act, and lead in pursuit of the public good.
- We embrace our responsibilities as place-based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically.
- We harness the capacity of our institutions—through research, teaching, partnerships, and institutional practice—to challenge the prevailing social and economic inequalities that threaten our democratic future.
- We foster an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.”

In order to fulfill these important commitments, President Simmons appointed a broadly-based committee of faculty, students, and professional staff to draft the following Civic Action Plan for Simpson College. The Civic Action Plan is organized into five categories reflecting the priorities set forth in the joint Campus Compact statement. Within each category, the committee sets forth *successes*, *opportunities*, *aspirations*, and *results* that can be measured over time to determine the long-term impact of this Civic Action Plan.

The Simpson College Civic Action Plan seeks to integrate engaged teaching, engaged scholarship, community partnerships, and institutional action into a coherent framework to advance the public purposes of higher education.

I. Creating and Sustaining Mutually Respectful Partnerships

Successes:

Simpson College enjoys a **broad range of community partnerships** with more than 250 human and social service organizations and other Central Iowa nonprofits that provide a broad range of opportunities for Simpson students to perform direct service. Student service is supported by a part-time Service Coordinator position, several student employee positions in Student Development and Religious Life, and a voluntary committee of faculty, students, and staff members who support service initiatives that meets regularly to coordinate and provide guidance for volunteer and community service programs. Simpson’s commitment to supporting student service has been recognized by the President’s Higher Education Community Honor Roll every year since its inception in 2006.

The **Wesley Service Scholarship** enables more than one hundred Simpson students every year to commit at least 80 hours of direct service to community partners. The Wesley Service Scholarship is a particularly effective tool for student engagement and retention.

The **Iowa College AmeriCorps Program (ICAP)** provides an annual education award of \$1,200 or more to a select group of students who commit to performing at least 300 hours of direct service in a given calendar year. Simpson has placed 43 ICAP members (2007 - 2015) who have earned a total of \$47,040 in education awards.

Rotaract, the college-based affiliate of Rotary Clubs, mobilizes groups of Simpson students to volunteer for major charitable events and projects.

Simpson's **Religious Life Community (RLC)** provides regular service opportunities at a variety of non-profit organizations. Regular partners include the Catholic Worker House, Central Iowa Shelter and Services, Children and Family Urban Movement, Second Chance Dog Rescue, and Habitat for Humanity. Additionally, RLC coordinates alternative fall and spring break trips that allow students to spend their break in service and reflection in a variety of locations across the country.

Students involved in **Greek Life** at Simpson are among the most service-oriented at the college. Each fraternity and sorority conducts service and programming around a particular charitable cause.

A broad range of **Student Organizations** and special initiatives contribute many more service hours and projects. Organizations such as the Sustainability Club, Sexual Assault Response Advocates (SARA), EMERGE, Best Buddies, etc.

Opportunities:

While Simpson enjoys a broad range of **community partnerships** with hundreds of local organizations, the College has an opportunity to develop deeper and **more impactful relationships** with a select group of partners. Doing so will enable student volunteers to engage in higher-level, longer-term service projects focused on capacity-building and institutional growth.

Simpson also has an opportunity to enhance volunteer impact in targeted areas and promote greater student engagement by adopting an annual **service focus area**. Based on a survey of students engaged in service projects, the service coordinating committee has adopted hunger/food insecurity as the College's service focus area for 2017-18. Special events, speakers, and calls to service will bring students' attention to the service focus area.

Existing internship programs supported by the Great Lakes Career Ready Internship Grant and other sources also provide an opportunity to place more students in **service-focused internships**.

In 2017-2018, Simpson's Office of Career Development and Civic Engagement will roll out **Galaxy Digital**, a new service tracking and placement system that will enable students to more easily identify service opportunities and report their hours.

All non-faculty staff members at Simpson College are granted an annual allotment of **volunteer time-off (VTO)**, which historically has been underutilized. The College has an opportunity to promote VTO and encourage staff to support student service commitments.

Aspirations:

Successful roll out of **Galaxy Digital platform** for use by Wesley Service Scholars during 2017-18 academic year to search for service opportunities and track service hours. In subsequent years, expand Galaxy Digital usage to cover all service projects and hours completed by Simpson students, faculty, and staff.

Secure a stable, ongoing **source of funding for internships** similar to the Great Lakes Career Ready Internship Grant, which runs through spring 2018.

Progression of responsibilities for students: direct service in years one and two, capacity-building in years three and four.

Nurture student relationships with partner organizations that may continue after graduation and lead to a range of volunteer service and professional opportunities for alumni.

Continue and expand the newly-created **Wesley Service Scholars annual recognition brunch**, launched in spring 2017, to recognize all civic engagement across campus.

Build a more sustained, collaborative relationship with the **Community Foundation of Warren County** to provide more opportunities for students to meet emerging community needs.

Increase staff utilization of **volunteer time off (VTO)** each year for three years.

Results:

Successful implementation of **Galaxy Digital** in May 2017 and used for tracking for WSS in 2017-18.

Increase number of students with **capacity-building service opportunities**.

Measure number of **students working for community partners after graduation**.

Host civic engagement event in 2018.

II. Preparing Students for Lives of Engaged Citizenship

Successes:

Simpson's **Engaged Citizenship Curriculum** is designed to embed values of civic participation, global awareness, and constructive engagement with differing views into the learning experience for all students. Spring 2014 results from Simpson seniors responding to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicated that two of the strongest areas of engagement were related to deep, reflective, and integrated learning. Among the practices that have been demonstrated to lead to that kind of deep learning are **intentional service and civic engagement involvements**.

Student organizations provide excellent opportunities for students to engage meaningfully with each other and the broader community through service and advocacy during their time on campus. Several organizations also promote **long-term student connections to service clubs** like Rotary International that will follow them after graduation.

The John C. Culver Public Policy Center sponsors programming and student engagement opportunities focused on **civic and political participation**. Culver Fellows register other students to vote and encourage them to inform themselves on important public policy debates.

The Iowa History Center and its Distinguished Scholars program provides opportunities for students to **explore and share their interests in Iowa history** through a series of lectures and public programs.

One of the five **learning domains** identified by the Division of Student Development is **Citizenship and Responsibility**. Specific intended learning outcomes in this domain include an expectation that students will "examine and broaden an awareness of their relationship to the larger community, leading to more

active engagement with the Simpson and extended communities.” Following the spring 2016 adoption of the learning domains and intended outcomes, assessments of the actual student learning and behavior are currently being developed and implemented.

Opportunities:

Simpson College has pockets of highly active students committed to service and civic engagement. More active promotion of service and engagement opportunities from more areas on campus is needed to **increase participation across the student body and combat burnout among highly active students**. The College could also incorporate more reflection and evaluation of student service and engagement work in order to enhance its meaningfulness and applicability outside the campus environment.

The effectiveness and stability of student organizations are often hindered by a lack of leadership development and succession planning. Simpson could **promote more effective leadership through training and orientation programs**, while helping student leaders **develop succession plans** to promote organizational continuity and relevance year after year.

Simpson has begun to lay the groundwork for more honest, open dialogues across a range of differences through programs such as Ask Me Anything, Dessert & Dialogues, and Forum discussions of diversity, inclusion, and power issues on campus sponsored by the Multicultural/Minority Issues Committee (MMIC), the campus-wide Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and the Inclusive Campus Action Group. The College should build upon these programs and initiatives to **promote more honest, respectful dialogues on controversial and divisive issues**.

In keeping with another primary learning domain identified by the Division of Student Development, students should be encouraged to **set service goals that align with both their personal aspirations and the needs of society** and to define specific steps to act upon those goals.

Aspirations:

Achieve full annual participation of **120 students in Wesley Service Scholar (WSS) program** through enhanced recruitment and retention initiatives. Work with Admissions and Financial Assistance to communicate WSS stipend more effectively to new and continuing students.

Expand the **Simpson Symposium** (Undergraduate Research & Creativity Symposium) to include other **high-impact learning experiences** in volunteer service, study abroad, and internships.

Enhance service coordination with **Simpson Greek Life**.

Work with new **Honors program** to incorporate more service opportunities and service-learning elements into student experiences.

Continue to **increase the voting participation rate** of Simpson students over prior election cycles.

Results:

120 students participating in the **Wesley Service Scholars program**.

Incorporate service-learning feature into annual **Simpson Symposium**.

Achieve capability to **track and aggregate service hours** from sororities and fraternities.

Increased number of **courses incorporating service learning**.

Increased **voter participation rate** of Simpson students.

III. Contributing to the Health and Strength of our Communities

Successes:

Wesley Service Scholars contribute an average of 8,000 hours of service annually. The value of that volunteer time is approximately \$184,000 annually, most of which is served in Warren County. In 2017-18, eleven ICAP students will serve a total of 3300 hours, with a volunteer time value of \$75,900, mostly in Warren County. These hours are the equivalent of about 5 full time employees and 1 part time employee.

Simpson's **Religious Life Community** organizes and supports alternative **fall break and spring break service trips** that place several dozen students in high-impact service projects nationwide.

Simpson's commitment to **interfaith awareness** and positive engagement has been growing especially since 2010, when we began sending students to Interfaith Youth Core's Interfaith Leadership Institutes. These help students develop crucial leadership skills as they strengthen their commitment to enhancing interfaith understanding, on campus and beyond. From 2011 until 2015, Simpson also had an **Interfaith Council**, which included members of the greater Des Moines community and represented diverse religious perspectives (e.g., Jewish, Buddhist, atheist). The Council has not met lately, but we hope to reconstitute it next year. The Council and Chapel Interfaith Interns regularly planned interfaith service events, where people of diverse faiths work together on a service project, get to know each other, and learn what in their respective worldviews inspires them to serve in such a way. Next year's interfaith interns have already stated their intention to hold similar service events. This year's interfaith interns did not host such an event, but they arranged for multiple opportunities for Simpson students to visit various houses of worship and get to know people of diverse faith perspectives. Introduction to World Religions requires students to attend at least one of these visits. A campus Passover Seder, hosted by Professor Heidi Berger, has become an annual tradition. Starting in the fall of 2017, Simpson will have Interfaith Fellows who will help us build on an already solid foundation.

Opportunities:

While a handful of individual Simpson professors have effectively incorporated service learning into syllabi, the College can and should do more to **encourage and support more faculty members to utilize service learning in their courses**. Future review and evaluation of the Engaged Citizenship Curriculum should include an emphasis on service learning opportunities.

With the creation of the new **Interfaith Fellows program**, Simpson has an opportunity to attract and retain a more religiously and culturally diverse core of students interested in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding across a variety of faith traditions.

Aspirations:

Increase the number of faculty members and academic departments that **incorporate service learning into syllabi**.

Expand the number and depth of **partnerships with student organizations** that already support and engage in community-focused projects, such as the Sustainability Club, PRSSA, CEO, and Rotaract.

Results:

Service learning techniques utilized by faculty in all academic departments.

Student organizations take on **more community-focused projects**.

IV. Harnessing Capacity to Challenge Social and Economic Inequalities

Successes:

Simpson works on several fronts to **break down inequalities** through teaching, research, and practice. Examples include the Ask Me Anything program, SARA, Simpson Pride, Black Student Union, Latinos Unidos, the Feminists Club, the Carver Fellows and Scholars program, the President's Commission on Diversity & Inclusion, the Multicultural/Minority Issues Committee, and the Inclusive Campus Action Group. The Culver Public Policy Center also sponsors programs on criminal justice reform, disability voting rights, other issues that educate students on inequalities.

Opportunities:

Simpson has an opportunity and obligation to **carefully analyze the extent to which persistent inequalities are being reinforced** through teaching, research, or practice.

While Simpson is making some strides, the College continues to experience challenges in **achieving greater diversity in student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention**. A greater focus is needed on active recruiting among traditionally underrepresented populations in Iowa and key out-of-state markets.

Opportunity to engage a broad cross-section of campus community in **programs that address inequalities**.

Aspirations:

Encourage and enable faculty members to expand syllabi to include **more critical examination of social and economic inequalities**.

Develop sufficient endowment funds to provide **more financial assistance to low-income students**.

Examine and incorporate elements of the **Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model**.

Results:

More courses throughout all academic departments expanded to carry "diversity and power" designation through a **greater focus on examination of social and economic inequalities**.

Diversity of student body increased through **focused recruiting, financial assistance, and retention initiatives**.

V. **Affirming the Public Purposes of Higher Education by Setting High Expectations for Achievement of Goals**

Successes:

Civic engagement is prominently featured in the Simpson College Mission Statement, strategic plan, and Engaged Citizenship Curriculum.

Simpson has made a strong institutional commitment through **funding of the Wesley Service Scholars program**.

Simpson has been recognized on the **President's Higher Education Community Honor Roll** every year since its inception in 2006.

Opportunities:

Simpson's convenient Central Iowa location provides access to service and volunteer opportunities, but some **barriers to transportation** remain.

Explore new methods of **measuring student involvement** in co-curricular activities that nurture civic engagement.

Explore **best practices** of other campuses.

Expand infrastructure and support systems for **service learning**.

Continue to **build staff capacity and institutional resources** to support civic engagement programming and service opportunities.

Work with Admissions staff to **highlight service and engagement opportunities in recruitment materials** and messaging.

Increase staff utilization of **volunteer time off**, particularly to support student-led service programs.

Aspirations:

Successfully implement an **annual service focus area**.

Utilize metrics to **better gauge student participation**.

As part of future curriculum revisions, explore the possibility of requiring **experiential learning or other high-impact practices** which could include service learning, internships, study abroad, leadership positions, or undergraduate research.

Expand **service learning** courses.

Simpson's president, cabinet, and all-campus budget committee increase their **commitments to civic engagement and service programs**.

Explore the potential addition of a minor or concentration in **non-profit management**.

Results:

Track numbers of students engaged in service projects.

Track students who **respond positively to recruiting messages** that stress Simpson's commitment to service and civic engagement.

Measure number of courses with strong **service learning components**.

Track number of **volunteer time off** hours used.

Successfully implement a **campus-wide centralized service hub** that gets more students, faculty, and staff members engaged in more service projects.