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UNIVERSITY

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Iowa Wesleyan University

Civic Action Plan

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Vision/Mission

The purpose of a Civic Action Plan is to create comprehensive engagement for the common good. That engagement should connect a university's students, faculty, staff and community partners to develop like-minded pursuits of future sustainability and equity. The Civic Action Plan also desires to prepare students to understand the importance of civic engagement and create a desire to be active citizens as well as the university being a cornerstone of sustainability for our community and region. A component of the mission of a Civic Action Plan is also to strengthen our democratic future through educational practices such as teaching and research. Strategic partnerships and institutions modeling democratic practices also aid in challenging societal inequalities. The final part of a Civic Action Plan mission attends to the public purpose of higher education which is to create an institutional culture for its members to achieve great things by setting high expectations for them.

Iowa Wesleyan University's mission statement reads: Iowa Wesleyan University is a transformational learning community whose passion is to educate, empower and inspire students to lead meaningful careers and lives. Our mission and the mission of the Civic Action Plan are very similar. The Office of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement's goal is to prepare our future graduates for giving back to their communities by integrating service-learning and civic engagement within their curricular and co-curricular activities through opportunities that are focused on their own and surrounding communities in southeast Iowa. These opportunities will help our students connect with their communities, engage social justice and advance human welfare. The vision of the Office of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement is to foster the growth of our servant leaders at our university who will make positive social changes in our world.

Approach

The university has two objectives in order to work towards this vision. The first is to provide students with information on issues that are related to community development, social justice and human welfare on the local, regional, and global levels. Once given the information on these issues, the second objective is that we provide opportunities to act on these issues that are both curricular and co-curricular.

The current existing curriculum for Iowa Wesleyan University includes a graduation requirement of students being required to enroll in four courses that have a service-learning component. The service-learning courses partner with community members to create a project or program for students to actively participate in to become more involved and aware of their community. At the end of every semester, those classes that did service-learning projects hold a Student Showcase to present their projects to Iowa Wesleyan students as well as community members.

Some examples are partnering with the Henry County Extension Office and Van Allen Elementary School to provide an after school mentoring program. Another is to volunteer at the Fellowship Cup and help organize materials for the Quarter Store in Mount Pleasant. Some of our science courses go to our elementary schools to run small experiments with the children to help grow their interests in science.

As Southeast Iowa's regional, comprehensive university, Iowa Wesleyan has an obligation and responsibility to create a strong and mutually beneficial "town-gown" relationship. To that end, significant effort has been made to build connections between the internal and external communities and these efforts have been fruitful for both the community

and Iowa Wesleyan. The university currently has partners throughout Mount Pleasant and the Southeast Iowa region.

The Service-Learning Advisory Committee, comprised of faculty and staff and chaired by the Director of Service Learning, also plays a big part in assessing courses coded as service-learning and what requirements need to be completed for students to earn that SL credit. The committee is currently in the final stages of rebuilding the requirements and have established more ground rules to create a stronger foundation for future service-learning courses. Right now, challenges the committee are addressing is having minimal service-learning course offerings within certain majors and continue to strengthen and build upon the foundation and structure of what comprises a service-learning course.

The committee is currently revising existing documents to outline what is required for a course to be considered “service-learning.” It will require professors to fill out a proposal form for a course to be considered service-learning. The form requests information about the project the students will partake in, what concepts the students will learn while participating in the service project, as well as what the reflection components will be and how they connect to the curriculum and lastly asking how the project will be sustainable.

One of the primary goals of the Service Learning Advisory Committee is to have at least one person from every academic departments aware of the process, expectations and actions the Service Learning Advisory Committee takes when approving Service Learning Courses.

Outcomes

As previously stated, Iowa Wesleyan University students are required to take four courses that have a service-learning component in order to graduate. Those courses are broken down to one course per academic year for the entirety of a student's time at Iowa Wesleyan.

The outcome goals for academic SLCE is that students will be able to articulate how their SLCE experience influenced their understanding of discipline specific concepts as well as influenced their civic identity and continued commitment to public action. The outcome goals for the co-curricular SLCE learning is that students will be able to articulate and demonstrate how their SLCE experience influenced their understanding of different cultural/political attitudes and beliefs and how that either reinforced or altered their own attitudes and beliefs. Students will also be able to articulate and demonstrate how their SLCE experience influenced their civic identity and continued commitment to public action.

In order to assess the identified SLCE learning outcomes, the AACU Civic Engagement Rubric will be used for the Civic Identity and Commitment outcome and Diversity of Communities and Cultures outcome. These are usually done at the end of the course through a survey over the project done in the course.

Implementation

The Civic Action Plan is being used in our academic and co-curricular planning. The university is currently building a solid foundation to create a sustainable program model for the Service-Learning Advisory Committee to work towards. As previously mentioned, this group is

a big part in deciding what is considered service-learning and civic engagement at Iowa Wesleyan University.

The committee is in the final steps of creating a portfolio that includes documents of all of the requirements that are involved in a service-learning course and for co-curricular activities. The goal is to have this portfolio finalized within the coming months and start implementing it in the Fall 2018 semester.

In order to implement this plan, the Service-Learning Advisory Committee has created some documents to lay the foundation of what the university wants service-learning courses to look like. The first document outlines the requirements for a course to meet the Service Learning requirements which includes the objectives of a SL course. That objective is to provide the students with both course and service opportunities related to community development, social justice, and human welfare throughout the local, regional, and global community. The document also discusses the minimum number of 15 contact hours on their project. This includes preparation time for the project, actual time of the project and final reflection time after the project is finished.

Another document in the portfolio is a proposal form to make a course service-learning. It includes the course information such as the department, course number, number of credits and instructor teaching the course. The instructor will have to answer six questions pertaining to why the course should be service-learning based such as:

- What the project for the course is.
- What need/ social issue/ problem would the SL project address?
- How would the project enhance student understanding of course concepts?
- How will students reflect the project?

- How will the project advance the development of community/social justice?
- Would the project be a one-time offering or would it be offered every semester for the course?

The final document of the portfolio is a general document of defining what the Center for Service-Learning & Civic Engagement is and what its objectives are. The document states the university's mission as well as the vision of SLCE. It goes into the objectives, outcome goals for both academic and co-curricular service-learning, and expectations for the courses.

Communication

Communication is key to any successful group or organization and it is essential in making things run smoothly. It is also a necessary component to keeping everything consistent and transparent within the institution and in the community. That is very much true in what the university is trying to implement. Since the transition to the current curriculum-based approach to Service-Learning, the day to day operations of Service-Learning has trumped the foundational aspects of the program. The Service-Learning Advisory Committee is currently trying to reestablish clear and concise ways to communicate our Service Learning philosophy and to whom in order to reinforce that foundation for everyone.

In order to strengthen communication about service learning between the campus community, the Service-Learning Advisory Committee meets once a month to discuss the agenda, update everyone on what has transpired since the previous meeting, and identify items to work on in the future.

To also help with communication, the committee has created a brief handbook detailing what the committee does and who is involved with it. The members involved with the SL

Committee include the Vice-President for Student Development, Director of Service-Learning, Assistant Dean for Wesleyan Studies, the Registrar and three full-time faculty representatives.

The handbook discusses the purpose of the committee which is:

- To administer with the Vice-President of Academic Affairs the curricular SL program for the university;
- To develop and recommend procedures for the development and implementation of SL courses;
- To review, evaluate, and approve SL components within courses; and
- To actively collaborate with Assessment Committee in developing and reviewing assessment results of SL courses.

The final part of the handbook is reviewing what the responsibilities are for the committee such as:

- Review/revise/propose SL policy
- Establish policy and procedures for development and execution of SL courses
- Review/evaluate/approve SL components of new SL courses and existing courses
- Review assessment results

Goals

As the University engages in the self-assessment project during this academic year (2017-2018) academic year and as it continues to progress forward in its service-learning foundation, upcoming goals include:

- 1.) To execute the self-assessment project to determine current capacity and culture of Service at Iowa Wesleyan University.
- 2.) To better utilize Campus Compact as a resource to further cement Service as a signature program of Iowa Wesleyan University.
- 3.) To utilize the Service Learning Advisory Committee to further develop and implement the necessary foundational components of Service Learning.
- 4.) To identify ways to strategically grow and enrich co-curricular service.
- 5.) To collaborate with other institutions committed to service-learning and civic engagement to offer more robust and impactful experiences that benefit both the student experience and the greater good.

Conclusion

Service-learning is a signature component of Iowa Wesleyan University with a rich history dating back to the 1960s. The Service-learning program at Iowa Wesleyan is one of the longest-operating programs in the United States. Excitingly, the University has already begun incorporating the components of this Civic Action Plan into the curriculum and also co-curricular activities. During the 18 months, the university has strengthened existing and created new partnerships with the Mount Pleasant community as well as the surrounding communities. A foundation is being set for furthering service-learning and civic engagement in the classroom.

The Civic Action Plan wishes to empower, prepare, embrace, harness and foster service learning in higher education in order for students to go through their lives and give back to their communities on the local/regional/global level. At Iowa Wesleyan University, with the help of the Civic Action Plan, this goal is and will continue to be achieved.