

Connecticut College Civic Action Plan

In December 2016 President Bergeron, along with many other Presidents and Chancellors, signed Campus Compact's 30th Anniversary Statement reaffirming Connecticut College's commitment to advance civic education. In a parallel process, Connecticut College faculty approved a re-envisioned curriculum, called Connections, that builds on the College's historic strength in integrative liberal education; and the College, in turn, developed a new strategic plan that builds on the strength of this educational vision. We have therefore aligned the College's new civic action plan with the development of Connections and the important initiatives associated with it: the creation of the Global-Local Engagement Council and the Otto and Fran Walter Commons for Global Study and Engagement.

Mission, Vision, and Principles

Connecticut College and its surrounding community, the historic seaport city of New London, have a longstanding history of partnership and collaboration. The College was founded in 1911 as the first baccalaureate institution in the state dedicated to the higher education of women. Residents of the City of New London offered land and raised \$135,000 to win the bid to host the new college. Over the last century, the relationship between the city and the College has evolved in a variety of ways, but the shared commitment toward cultivating a better world has endured. Connecticut College continues to support students in developing their sense of public responsibility, whether in a local, tribal, regional, national, or international arena.

A central element of Connections is the principle of informed engagement. The integration of meaningful experiences in the local community and around the world is a critical aspect of 21st-century learning. Purposeful off-campus experiences connected to academic pursuits will allow students to advance the public good. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recognizes that 21st-century education must address itself to a world of increasing complexity, diversity, and change: Connections prepares students for these realities by exposing them to issues from a multitude of perspectives; by enhancing their capacity to think, interpret, and collaborate across conventional geographical and disciplinary boundaries; and by encouraging greater self-awareness of social identity and social location in relation to local, regional, national, and international communities.

Study away, summer internships, and on-campus or local community projects provide high-impact opportunities through which students extend classroom learning to real world and practical contexts, while engaging topics related to social change and civic identity. We note that participation rates in these programs are currently robust: 55 percent of students study away for at least one semester; more than 70 percent of each graduating class participate in community-learning activities; and 80 percent take advantage of the College's paid internship program. Our concern, then, is not to expand the scope of these programs but to connect them more tightly and intentionally to a student's four-year course of study. Connections calls on faculty and staff

- to frame off-campus learning more intentionally
- to attend to the educational quality of these experience
- to prepare students for off-campus experiences with appropriate skills, knowledge, and cultural sensitivity
- to assess and address issues of access and equity.

In this way, Connections aims to provide 100 percent of all students with a meaningful and purposeful global-local engagement experience.

The Global Engagement Council, including representatives from the faculty, staff, and departments practicing off-campus learning, was formed during the 2015-2016 academic year. That incarnation of the committee was responsible for creating the Global-Local Engagement Guiding Principles articulated below. These principles and the continued work of the Council provide the broader framework in Connections that several areas across campus currently use to guide student learning and program development.

Global-Local Engagement Guiding Principles

Students educated in global-local engagement will display the following outcomes:

- **Understanding and Connecting across Difference**
Demonstrate the ability to understand multiple worldviews, experiences, and power structures; to listen, interpret, and communicate across cultures and across lines of difference; and to work collaboratively and respectfully to address complex issues in the face of diverse and even conflicting positions.
- **Critical Reflexivity and Inquiry**
Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of self-identity, including one's own heritage, values, and assumptions, in relation to the world. Develop an openness to and willingness to engage alternative vantage points, strives for mutual understanding with others, and refines one's own worldview based on experiences and interactions in different communities and cultures. Show ability to assess and critique multiple worldviews and perspectives including one's own.
- **Understanding Global Issues from Local Contexts**
Demonstrate the intellectual capacity to analyze issues, phenomena, and questions of global significance in their historical complexity and nuance across disciplinary boundaries and geographic contexts. Recognize that globalizing processes link one's own life to the lives of others and to the life of the planet and that such processes manifest in uneven and often highly inequitable ways in local communities, whether in the United States or elsewhere. Understand that lasting solutions to the multidimensional challenges facing humanity and the environment in the 21st century require attentiveness to global-local linkages and fragmentations; local knowledges and practices; competition over limited resources, and contested notions of the common good.
- **Learning Beyond the Classroom**
Connect and extend theoretical knowledge and skills from formal academic studies to real-world contexts, thereby deepening one's understanding and capacity to address the global and/or local dimensions of significant topics, issues or problems. Recognize that knowledge and practice are expanded through reciprocal and collaborative exchange with members of diverse communities and cultures.
- **Personal and Collective Commitment to Working Towards a More Just, Equitable, and Sustainable World**
Take informed action in collaboration with local partners to address ethical, social, and environmental challenges in domestic and/or international contexts. Demonstrate ability

to recognize existing local assets and to draw on those resources to address local needs and priorities. Evaluate and take responsibility for the consequences of individual and collective actions in an increasingly interdependent world, and strive for sustainable outcomes and more empowered communities.

- **Capacity for Self-Reflection**

Demonstrate the will and capacity to continually reflect on and evaluate personal experiences, the outcomes of global-local civic engagement (one's own and others), and interactions across differences; and to make adjustments to one's own worldview, actions, or relationships. While these reflections and evaluations contribute to personal growth, by incorporating them into systems and structures, they can also contribute to the enhancement of collective action and partnerships.

Approach and Infrastructure

To advance our principles of global-local engagement, we will utilize existing campus resources, while also seeking ways to build greater capacity to expand community learning and partnerships. In addition to drawing on our Connections curriculum, this civic action plan was developed in tandem with the College's strategic plan, Building on Strength, and its self-study for the New England Association for Schools and Colleges (NEASC) reaccreditation process. Existing resources and programs for civic action include Community Partnerships, the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy, The Otto and Fran Walter Commons for Global Study and Engagement, the Office of Sustainability, and the Office of Institutional Equity and Inclusion.

Community Partnerships is a department on campus with the distinct mission "to advance the next generation of active citizens through student engagement experiences in the New London area." It consists of a team of three full-time staff members and one half-time staff member along with two AmeriCorps VISTA members. Through Community Partnerships faculty, staff, and students work in collaboration with the local community to build a healthier and more just society by means of local engagement opportunities, work-study positions, and community-based learning courses. Community Partnerships works closely with the College's Financial Aid Office to optimize the Federal Work Study program to broaden access for students to engage in important community work. Federally funded work-study mandates at least 7 percent of students must work in community service areas; the College exceeds this by placing 19 percent of the College's work-study allocation in community service positions. Community Partnerships works with approximately 50 local nonprofits to put into place contracts and job descriptions so that college students can participate at community based sites. Key interest areas include education, healthcare, environmental preservation, and human rights. Partnership programs are designed collaboratively in conjunction with New London Public Schools to address academic improvement measures. These structured cohort experiences provide college students with teaching and learning opportunities ranging from forums for developing leadership abilities, opportunities to practice translating ideas into actions, environments for increasing identity, class and cultural understanding, language immersion, and development of their civic and social identities. Further, students often acquire requisites for fellowships, graduate, and professional schools as well as careers, and national/international programs and internships.

The Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy (Holleran Center) is a multidisciplinary academic center that advances teaching, learning, research, and community collaborations. It works to create more just and equitable communities through programs that cultivate intellectual and ethical judgment. The Holleran Center is well integrated throughout the campus and provides support to numerous departments for research, community learning, and other initiatives that are consistent with the Center's mission. To further strengthen the College's curricular commitment to engaged scholarship and community-learning as an important component of a liberal arts education, the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy supports the work of faculty to introduce community-learning into existing courses, redesign existing community-learning courses, and to develop new courses. The Holleran Center also supports community-based research in areas of social justice concerns such as economic opportunity, health and wellness, the environment, K-12 education, youth development, and art/culture/public space. The Holleran Center supports this work through annual grants, scholarly resources, and faculty workshops and training. It offers a certificate program that combines interdisciplinary study, a funded internship, and a senior integrative project – all focused on a student-defined interest in civic action and/or public policy. Since its inception, the Holleran Center has solidified its reputation for preparing students for lives of civic engagement and leadership while collaborating with community partners to advance the public good.

Over the past decade, various faculty-driven initiatives have sharpened a college-wide vision for global education, while promoting the design of new academic courses and programs that maximize our existing resources. A succession of major institutional grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, as well as the establishment of the International Curriculum Development Fund through the generous gift of an anonymous donor, funded pilot projects to teach world languages and cultures at local K-5 public schools, deepen the curricular integration of students' international experiences, expand faculty expertise in the field of global environmental justice, support curricular innovation in Africana Studies, Global Islamic Studies, and Jewish Studies, and fortify reciprocal educational partnerships with institutions abroad. In a newly renovated space on campus, **The Otto and Fran Walter Commons for Global Study and Engagement**, will be a rigorous, multidisciplinary, and collaborative educational hub. The Commons will integrate technology-enhanced learning, rich faculty resources in area studies and transnational research, and leading interdisciplinary scholarship centered on social justice to infuse our classrooms, campus culture, and off-campus programs with diverse world perspectives on the relevant issues of our times. This new center will work across the College to support the integration of global and local concerns through language study, research abroad, study away, public engagement, globally-focused courses, and co-curricular programming.

Another longstanding value held by the College is a commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. Since its founding in 2013, the **Office of Sustainability** has worked with students, faculty, staff and partners to implement sustainable projects both on campus and in the community. The Office of Sustainability offers educational opportunities such as courses, events, and scholastic programming related to holistic sustainability. The sustainability fellows program is a structure that supports students as they gain experience looking at campus and community problems through the lens of sustainability and works to find lasting solutions that address economic, social, and environmental justice. The Office of Sustainability is committed to

maintaining and deepening its relationships with community partners through its work. Additional earth justice opportunities take place within the **Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment**, which is a comprehensive, interdisciplinary certificate program that builds on one of the nation's leading undergraduate environmental studies programs. The Center fosters research, education, and curriculum development aimed at understanding contemporary ecological challenges.

The Office of the Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion (DIEI) is another key partner in helping the Connecticut College community develop and practice principles of ethical civic engagement. This office is responsible for promoting a culture of “full participation” that emphasizes the responsibility of all community members to help each member of the community realize their full potential. Through programming, policy implementation, and dialogue, DIEI works to embed cultural competency in all dimensions of the College. It is a source of advocacy for social justice on campus and in the local community, nation, and larger world. Encompassed in DIEI is the College's multicultural center, Unity House. Unity House provides academic, cultural and personal support to students of color and other underrepresented students on campus, while helping them develop intellectual, social and leadership skills. Unity House also collaborates with other college departments and offices to educate the larger student body on issues of diversity and multiculturalism. A core aspect of the DIEI mission is the development of student leaders that affirm equity and inclusion, while displaying courage, compassion, integrity, and excellence. The DIEI often works in close partnership with the **Center for the Critical Study of Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE)** to develop programming about equity and inclusion. CCSRE is the fifth, and newest, interdisciplinary academic center at the College. CCSRE is a focal point on campus for researching and teaching race and ethnicity across the disciplines. By focusing on comparative race and ethnic studies, the Center recognizes the multiple social, historical, cultural, religious, and political contexts that have shaped the construction of racial and ethnic groups.

These offices and programs, along with many of our colleagues, work to foster student civic engagement, while collaborating with community based organizations to address community priorities. Our civic action plan helps to align these activities and coordinate their efforts more systematically, especially in light of our new Connections curriculum. The plan articulates outcomes for civic engagement that express the shared values of Connecticut College and the local community, while fulfilling Connections’ integrative educational objectives.

Outcomes and Implementation

The College recognizes that civic engagement can take many different forms – it can happen during study away and summer internships, through collaborative work in the community, and active involvement in campus-shared governance. In Connections, the expectation is that students will pursue purposeful experience in diverse communities and cultures in order to gain insight and perspective on what it means to participate fully and with integrity in a pluralistic world. Campus Compact’s Civic Action statement outlines five goals that institutions of higher education should work towards to fulfill their public purposes. The five goals are aligned with the College’s mission to educate students “to put the liberal arts into action as citizens in a global society.”

Below we outline specific actions that Connecticut College will take in the next five years to advance the Campus Compact Civic Actions Goals. Appendix grids further detail the indicators of success and key areas of campus that will be involved in each Connecticut College strategy. The Dean of the College and Director of Community Partnerships will be central points of contact for communications and will plan a biennial gathering of all parties to report on status updates.

Campus Compact Civic Action Goal 1

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.

Connecticut College actions:

- Develop a shared civic engagement advising program including the Office of Career Services, Community Partnerships, Study Away, and the five interdisciplinary centers that provide education related to off-campus learning
- Analyze previous introductory community based learning courses and implement a regularly offered first-year seminar course introducing students to engaged scholarship and community-learning. Create a Community Engagement (CE) designation for course listings
- Expand the number of opportunities for student organizations to participate in meaningful group service opportunities within the greater New London community
- Conduct inventory of the strength of all global-local partnerships

Campus Compact Civic Action Goal 2

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.

Connecticut College actions:

- Increase support for faculty, staff and students to integrate reflective practices into community engaged scholarship, using resources such as e-portfolios
- Develop a regularly offered spring workshop to introduce New London and frameworks of civic engagement to students entering the pathways
- Empower and equip student organizations with skills and knowledge about how to enact social change while attempting to reduce structural inequities
- Strengthen international experiences, including internships, volunteering and study away, site visits, and partnerships/exchanges
- Offer extensive trainings for faculty, staff, and students to further expand equity literacy

Campus Compact Civic Action Goal 3

We embrace our responsibilities as place-based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities—economically, socially, environmentally, educationally, and politically.

Connecticut College actions:

- Develop and implement MOU with New London Public Schools that articulates the ways in which we will collaborate and foster shared student learning
- Conduct institutional assessment of community impact on an annual basis
- Establish a process through which external stakeholders are engaged in College land use planning, projects and other institutional decisions that affect the broader community
- Provide transportation and childcare to support community-wide attendance at campus events such as guest lectures, fundraising initiatives, and keynote speakers
- Expand financial and transportation services, increasing campus participation at community events such as Community Dinners, festivals, fundraising events, etc.
- Enhance global-local engagement opportunities with community organizations in the areas of sustainable food, education, and social innovation

Campus Compact Civic Action Goal 4

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.

Connecticut College actions:

- Continue to increase reciprocal partnership with local tribes, as Connecticut College and the City of New London are situated upon Pequot land
- Create a Community Partnerships advisory board to allow for broader local representation in the office's strategic planning and program development
- Conduct analysis of Connecticut College organizational structure with regards to community engagement
- Create a community relations role that liaisons between the College and local community

Campus Compact Civic Action Goal 5

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.

Connecticut College actions:

- Ensure successful global-local engagement experiences for students within Connections
- Establish additional funding and staff resources dedicated to supporting faculty in the integration of engaged scholarship, community-based learning and research into their courses
- Increase grant opportunities and advising specific to students developing and implementing community projects and scholarship
- Organize and implement an increased number of campus and community-wide lectures, workshops, panels, and speakers that focus on social justice topics
- Launch new programming in the Walter Commons that showcases student learning outcomes and create structured opportunities for community partners to connect with students, staff, and faculty on campus