

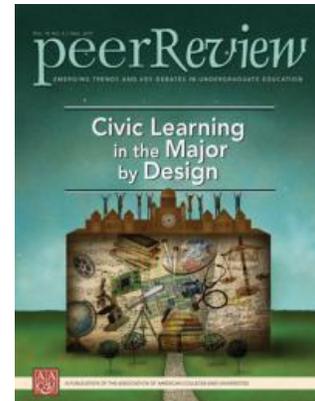
Civic Learning for All Students

By: Margaret M. Mulrooney, Melody K. Eaton and Lisa E. McGuire

On November 8, 2016, thousands of James Madison University (JMU) undergraduates lined up at the campus polling precinct to cast their votes. They were laughing and chatting with strangers, snapping selfies, and posting on social media, each student eager to record the memory of that historic event. And that's a key takeaway from that day—for them, voting in their first presidential election, voting for perhaps the first time ever, was a major turning point in their civic lives. Regardless of how they voted, what matters most is that they participated at all.

Since the 2012 publication of *A Crucible Moment*, more and more colleges and universities are doing their part to reengage young Americans in the political process. This collective work reflects a recommitment on the part of institutions of higher education to fulfill their public purpose, but progress has been slow. A postelection survey by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) suggests that, despite a similar rate of youth (under age thirty) voter turnout in November 2016 compared to November 2012, it may be even harder in the future to get and keep youth politically motivated. Though more engaged and more eager for change than the previous generation, young people disagree over what change is needed and, more important, discount the ability of the traditional two-party system to effect any change at all. As CIRCLE concludes, “Stronger civic education and strategic, intentional youth outreach remains key.

At JMU, we are intentionally creating an environment in which civic learning is expected for every student. Although our mission statement has long called on us to prepare “educated and enlightened citizens who lead meaningful and productive lives,” the challenges of the twenty-first century prompted us to adopt a new approach that we hope can inspire appropriate changes elsewhere. First, we decided to promote through our current strategic plan three distinct kinds of engagement: engaged learning, community engagement, and civic engagement. We also created an Office for Strategic Planning and Engagement to track institutional progress within and across these three areas, and we designated an Engagement Advisory Group to provide day-to-day leadership and foster collaboration among the various engagement committees, academic entities, and administrative units that characterize the modern university. Most notably, we established the James Madison Center for Civic Engagement, an office with full-time personnel, an independent budget, and responsibility for coordinating and cultivating the civic competencies of our nearly 20,000 undergraduates. Mindful that we are a public institution, we volunteered to host the new Virginia Campus Compact chapter, sent distinguished representatives to Governor Terry McAuliffe’s Task Force on Millennial Civic Engagement, and annually host community forums and candidate



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debates. Though not inclusive, this summary suggests the kinds of institutional practices that not only foster the civic ethos that pervades our campus, but also aid the development of civically or politically oriented outcomes across the curriculum and cocurriculum.

An Outcomes-Based Approach

Civic learning for our undergraduates begins in our general education program, the Human Community, one of the oldest outcomes-based programs in the nation. For twenty years, we have required that students complete one of three unique four-credit courses designed to develop their knowledge of American political traditions and principles, and we have consistently strong evidence demonstrating the success of these courses. More recently, we added an ethical reasoning course to the offerings in our critical-thinking area, and we are piloting a new version of a human communication course that incorporates deliberative dialogue and public advocacy. In these and other ways, our program nicely aligns with the civic outcomes associated with the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

Academic departments also prepare our graduates for civic and social responsibility; political science, justice studies, and communication studies are all good examples. However, in answering AAC&U's recent Civic and Social Responsibility survey, we decided to highlight the exemplary curricular-design processes associated with the School of Nursing and the Department of Social Work. Housed in the College of Health and Behavioral Studies, these two departments reveal how civic outcomes can be woven into professional programs and majors that often fall outside the conventional paradigm.

Civic Learning Outcomes in Nursing

The School of Nursing (SON) has developed a civically enhanced curriculum that reflects the faculty's commitment to educating students about the process of enacting health policy and the importance of advocacy for clients, families, communities, and populations. The curriculum also integrates experiential learning opportunities that focus on improved health. It does all this while offering some of the most demanding and daunting academic programs on campus.

Admission to the undergraduate nursing major is regulated by strict progression standards and limited to no more than ninety students each semester or 180 per year. Once admitted, students complete an array of specialized courses like Pathophysiology and Pharmacology and Clinical Applications and Reasoning, yet they also have access (some required and some optional) to a variety of courses linked to health policy, including some from other departments:

- **Transition to Practice:** Students engage in activities such as creating public blogs on health care or health professional issues requiring a change, and they participate in interprofessional team-based learning activities based on health care advocacy initiatives. Legislators participate in all projects and advocacy events.
- **Healthy Health Policy:** Students explore a policy issue of importance to the local community, analyze available data, and develop evidence-based policy recommendations. Results are disseminated through professional posters and published policy briefs.
- **Rural Health:** Students study, observe, and participate in interdisciplinary assessment, planning, and delivery of community-based primary health care in partnership with residents and

agencies of a host rural county. Learning emphasizes rural culture, rural health care, and access inequities.

- **Community Mental Health Practice:** Provides a basis for understanding mental health policy and services. The focus is on the needs of the deinstitutionalized mentally ill patient and includes a service-learning component.

The SON requires cocurricular activities to promote patient/client, community, and professional advocacy and civic engagement. These activities are scaffolded to embed them in courses at each level of the program. Students are encouraged to participate in state and national advocacy events. For example, each year students are selected to attend the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's Student Health Policy Summit. This summit culminates in Capitol Hill visits led by nursing deans and directors who meet with federal legislators to advocate for nursing legislation. The educational focus on advocacy and health policy is promoted by specific recommendations from the Institute of Medicine's report, *The Future of Nursing* (2010), and by accrediting agencies for nursing education, to lead change for better population health.

According to a study by Diane Salvador (2010), 68.8 percent of 347 US nursing students received no education related to health policy, and 66.7 percent of students that did receive this education rated it as minimal to poor. This lackluster emphasis on health policy has been a driving force for nursing accrediting bodies and national recommendations for change. When students enter the program at JMU, they are initially focused on acquiring clinical knowledge and skills; however, by the time they graduate they have received content and experiential learning experiences on the health policy process; the current health care system; the importance of advocating for clients, families, and communities; and civic engagement. And thanks to JMU's nationally known assessment programs, the SON demonstrates annually the effectiveness of our curriculum.

Civic Learning Outcomes in Social Work

As a professional program with clearly stated values of social, economic, and environmental justice, the Department of Social Work also embeds civic learning and social responsibility throughout its undergraduate curriculum. For example, the major's first two sophomore-level courses are:

- **Introduction to Social Work:** This course is an overview of the social work profession with emphasis on various settings and diverse populations distinguished by age, class, race, ethnicity, culture, spirituality, family structure, marital status, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, socioeconomic status, and national origin, and the implications to social work practice. Introduction to Social Work focuses on practical experiences designed to enable students to gain familiarity with the dynamics of the profession.
- **Social Welfare:** This course introduces societal responses through history to basic human needs with an emphasis on social welfare policies. It focuses on socioeconomic realities across diverse segments of US society with a global context. Social Welfare explores professional, societal, and personal values in the development of responses to human needs.

In these classes, students complete a mandatory community service-learning project and a required advocacy project. Students also participate in an interprofessional poverty simulation that sensitizes them to issues of economic injustice. These required activities begin to build the lens declared

majors need to see how course content has practical applications in the community as well as how their voice matters in creating change.

Once they enter the junior level, students must complete Social Policy, which involves participating in a legislative advocacy day in Washington, DC, in the fall, or in Richmond, Virginia, in the spring. To develop their civic competencies, students in this course follow a bill and arrange to meet with their legislators to discuss it face to face. Then, during their senior year, all social work majors take Social Work Practice in Macro Systems, where they work in small groups to effect community change through education, research, or intervention methods. Each semester, faculty preplan several projects, including one that focuses on voter education/mobilization.

The Department of Social Work also relies on strategic cocurricular activities to promote students' civic competencies. Each year, the department and a student-led social work organization cosponsor a social work celebration that recognizes outstanding alumni and community representatives who challenge students to make a difference locally and nationally. The theme for the 2017 celebration was Water Is Life, and our featured speaker provided multiple examples of public advocacy for environmental justice. Similarly, the department sponsored a bus to the Women's March in Washington, DC, where students and faculty together let their voices be heard for the rights of women and other vulnerable populations.

The essential facilitating factor for this curriculum is our profession's commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice. The typical student in the United States comes to social work with a plan to work directly with clients and their families, and lacks awareness of the employment opportunities to address the social justice mission of the profession (Wolk et al. 1996). It is necessary to provide curricular and cocurricular experiences to allow students to grow in this area. The Social Work faculty at JMU has embraced the importance of civic learning beyond what might be expected for a relatively small department of eight full-time faculty. Course content is scaffolded to allow students to learn, simulate, and apply their knowledge in the areas of human rights and policy practice. Through curricular mapping, the faculty identified specific program driven assignments (PDAs) to achieve essential learning outcomes, one of which concerns human rights and social justice and another that focuses on social policy practice. These PDAs provide accountability to ensure that all majors achieve the stated outcomes for the program. In keeping with JMU's nationally known assessment programs, the Department of Social Work demonstrates annually the effectiveness of this approach for student learning.

Collaborative Initiatives for Civic Education in the Health Professions

The School of Nursing and the Department of Social Work have successfully collaborated on university-wide projects that provide interprofessional education that enhances and supports civic engagement in the health professions. The Health Policy Collaborative (HPC), for example, provides an infrastructure for research for practical policy solutions and a platform for experiential learning about advocacy for improved health. Developed by the School of Nursing in 2014, its university department partners include Social Work, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Health Sciences, Dietetics, and the College of Business. The synergy that occurs when two or more departments work collaboratively on advocacy initiatives is certainly one aspect of JMU's success.

The HPC's signature event is the annual Health Policy Summit (HPS). Both the School of Nursing and the Department of Social Work plan the HPS, a half-day, interprofessional experience involving 250–300 students and collaborating groups of experts from multiple fields. Using Michaelsen and

Sweet's (2008) team-based learning model, the summit goes beyond content in the major to apply concepts and solve problems through small-group interactions.

Prior to the summit, students receive information about a "hot topic" health care policy from either the state or federal level. On the day of the summit, students are placed into dozens of interprofessional teams based on both major and experience with policy advocacy. Members of each team take an individual readiness test and group readiness test and discuss their group's answers with faculty facilitators. These are teachable moments when faculty help students consider different perspectives on current policy matters.

The student teams then participate in a problem-solving exercise focused on that year's "hot topic." In 2016, for example, students considered the results of the politically charged decision in Virginia to turn down federal dollars for Medicaid expansion. Using an interactive activity entitled Mind the Gap, each team developed a proposal for providing care and coverage to 400,000 Virginians left uninsured. No matter what the "hot topic" may be, students must also create poster presentations that advocate for their proposals. Significantly, local legislators attend the summit, walk through the gallery of poster presentations, and talk with the students. The summit concludes when the student participants choose the three best proposals and the winning teams present their plans to the legislators and summit attendees. Faculty research on the summit appears in a peer-reviewed journal, *Nurse Educator*, and elsewhere.

A second example of collaboration for civic engagement is a recently renewed Rural Health course. This class, which has a service-learning requirement, is cross-listed between nursing and social work and focuses on the challenges of health care in a rural area. In planning this course, the social work professor developed a relationship with Remote Access Medical (RAM), a national organization that organizes weekend-long clinics in medically underserved areas across the nation. RAM provides medical, dental, and optometric services at no cost, often in high schools or even the county fairgrounds. Nursing and social work students enrolled in the course must attend a weekend clinic in rural Virginia. Back on campus, class discussions focus on the policy implications about the need for programs such as RAM and the importance of healthcare access.

A New Civic Vision

As JMU's commitment to civic engagement continues to grow, we hope that more departments will consider adopting a civic lens for their majors. We recognize that, in some cases, external accrediting agency demands, disciplinary proclivities, or progression standards may pose challenges. Faculty in our College of Education revised a summer course to include an innovative community outreach program through which our preservice teachers work with refugee families to provide literacy enrichment activities. Education faculty have also organized and led summer study abroad programs to Ireland, Costa Rica, England, and South Korea to promote global civic competency in our students. As these projects suggest, there are as many ways to promote civic learning outside the classroom as there are inside.

We have come a long way since the first JMU civic engagement task force convened to craft an institutional position statement and approach. *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* was a key text that that committee used to guide its work, and it has continued to shape the ethos here (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012). In the intervening years, we have made even greater strides. Under the leadership of President Jonathan R. Alger, we have a new civic vision to be the national model of the engaged university—

engaged with ideas and the world—and we are proud members of AAC&U’s Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement project, Campus Compact, and the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Finally, we are making our link to James Madison, chief architect of the US Constitution, clearer. “Learned institutions,” Madison wrote, “throw that light over the public mind which is the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty. . . . What spectacle can be more edifying or more seasonable than that of liberty and learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual and surest support?” Madison’s words ring as true today as they did in 1822. Our role as a “learned institution” is clear.

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