

# The American Democracy Project: Campus Audit California State University Sacramento

"The American Democracy Project is a multi-campus initiative that seeks to create an intellectual and experiential understanding of civic engagement for undergraduates enrolled at institutions that are members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The goal of the project is to produce graduates who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens in a democracy."  
(ADP mission statement)

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Submitted by Mary Kirlin  
Assistant Professor Public Policy and Administration  
Campus American Democracy Project Coordinator

916-278-4209

[kirlinm@csus.edu](mailto:kirlinm@csus.edu)

## **Campus Audit of Civic Engagement September 2003**

"The campus audit is an activity that we ask each campus to undertake as part of their participation in the American Democracy Project.

The purpose of the campus audit is to identify places and programs on campus where civic engagement activities are already underway, and places where activities might be started. The campus audit will allow participants to celebrate civic engagement that is already occurring, link sometimes unconnected efforts to one another, and identify opportunities to begin work in areas where civic engagement activities could occur. The campus audit is a critical tool of the campus planning process, and should occur early in the year-long campus conversation." (ADP language for campus audit)

### **California State University Sacramento Response January 2005**

During the fall of 2004 an audit was undertaken of CSUS campus activities related to civic engagement by Mary Kirlin, campus American Democracy Project (ADP) coordinator and Assistant Professor in the Public Policy and Administration Department. A format was provided by the national ADP office and the questions/prompts are highlighted in green throughout the document. In order to capture activity that was documented rather than anecdotal, the bulk of the work was done by examining written sources. Review of the campus mission statement, Presidential speeches and data from the Office of Institutional Research proved invaluable. Once the basic response data was gathered several individuals were interviewed to discern whether significant activities had been missed.

Conversations were held with Ric Brown, Academic Affairs; Greg Wheeler, General Education; Charlotte Cook, OCC; Lori Varlotta, Student Affairs; Cristy Jensen, Faculty Senate; and Linda Buckley, Curriculum and Assessment. None of these individuals reviewed the written report; I take responsibility for any omissions or errors. For the most part, discussions confirmed my conclusions, that is, while several individuals could point to anecdotal activities, none indicated there was a wealth of activity underway that was not captured. All individuals seemed interested in the potential that a civic engagement focus could offer and none had overarching concerns. Importantly, what "counted" as civic engagement varied widely, a reflection of the general confusion over terms such as community service, service learning and civic engagement. As used by ADP, civic engagement is more explicitly political than either community service or service learning.

The purpose of the audit is to create a realistic portrait of current campus activities and culture. The findings below are not intended to be judgmental about any programs or individuals, rather they are presented here as a broad status report. I am certain that there are individuals across the campus undertaking rich and valuable activities related to civic engagement that are not captured here; this audit does not ignore those efforts. To the contrary my hope is that the audit will provide an opportunity for them to step forward and help us create additional opportunities.

## Part One: Institutional Intentionality

*Pretend for a moment that you are a visitor to your campus. You spend a day walking the campus, looking at materials such as the mission statement, catalogue, view book, text of speeches by president and chief academic officer, slogans, reports of minutes of meetings of key groups, etc. You also talk with administrators, faculty and students. As a visitor, where do you find evidence of institutional intentionality with respect to civic engagement? Is it a prominent feature of the culture of the institution? Is it apparent to visitors: if so, how? Is it apparent to faculty: if so, how? Is it apparent to students: if so, how?*

### **The Quick Search: Civic Engagement on the CSUS Web search engine**

The first 10 "hits" for civic engagement on the CSUS web search engine include two government course assignments, and references to affiliated organizations including the Center for California Studies and the Center for Collaborative Policy. The Office of Community Collaboration showed up twice with links to service learning.

### **Campus Mission**

The campus mission does not make explicit reference to "civic engagement". However, there are several items related to civic engagement including preparing students for meaningful service to their community, respecting diversity, and using scholarly efforts to improve the quality of life of the community ([CSUS Mission Statement](#)).

### **Administrative Leadership**

In 2003 the campus welcomed Alexander Gonzalez as our new President. He replaced Don Gerth who had served as President for 19 years. Over the past two years CSUS has experienced significant turnover in most of the senior administrative positions. As new individuals assume leadership roles, they have been working with the President Gonzalez to implement his vision. "Destination 2010", the President's overarching plan, was most clearly articulated in the most recent [campus address](#) to include four goals; 1) Foster excellent academic and student programs, 2) Build a welcoming campus, 3) Create a dynamic physical environment, and 4) Develop community support.

The new administration is very interested in promoting positive relations with the surrounding community, both the more traditional community of residents, business, alumni and donors and the unique community of State government leaders located in and around the Capitol. Definitions of "community support" seem broadly focused on developing positive relationships with the community and providing research and policy support through faculty and research centers. Community support is not always explicitly linked to more political activities commonly associated with "civic engagement".

### **The Golden Asset**

A relatively new addition to the [President's website](#) promotes the 2.3 million volunteer hours students contribute to the community. Depending on the definition, volunteering may or may not involve explicitly political activities although it often has a civic component.

### **WASC Accreditation**

The third emphasis area selected for the upcoming WASC accreditation cycle is “Community Engagement and Impact”. Four focal points have been identified for this emphasis area and three could fit well with a civic engagement effort: engaging regional issues to enhance student learning, developing student citizenship values and skills and insuring the relationship between CSUS and the community is mutually beneficial. The work in the emphasis areas has yet to be defined more specifically.

### **American Democracy Project**

CSUS signed on to join the ADP early in the process but finding a campus coordinator proved difficult. The project was dormant for a year until a new faculty member heard about the program through another University and inquired about its status. Resources have been provided to support the faculty effort and interest seems to be increasing.

### **Summary**

While the institution is beginning to articulate an interest in the surrounding community, the shape of that interest remains quite fluid and a newcomer to the campus would not easily find evidence of a strong commitment to civic engagement. However, with some deeper digging, it becomes apparent that there are tremendous opportunities to increase the focus on civic engagement, should that become desirable.

## Part Two: Academic Focus on Civic Engagement

*Where is civic engagement found in the academic areas of campus?  
Curricular Focus on Civic Engagement*

*A focus on civic engagement in General Education courses*

General Education (GE) courses do not have explicit focus on civic engagement although one of the learning goals (as part of the [undergraduate baccalaureate learning objectives](#)) is VALUES AND PLURALISM defined as “The ability to apply ethical standards in order to make moral judgments with respect to individual conduct and citizenship, and to recognize the diversity of human experiences and cultures, both within the United States and internationally. The development of positive social attitudes, values and behaviors.”

Specific expectations related to civic engagement include the student’s a) recognition of the moral dimensions of decisions and actions, b) understanding of and respect for those who are different from oneself, c) willingness to accept individual responsibility, d) ability to work collaboratively with those who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, e) ability to recognize and understand the implications of various social structures and the ways people are grouped by such characteristics as status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and f) valuation of service as a component of active citizenship.

While several GE courses include assignments or components that could be related to civic engagement, the connections are not visible to students seeking those opportunities nor are they actively promoted or coordinated.

*Content of courses (features of courses that explore foundations of democracy, core principles of American democracy, key American documents, contemporary issues in American life)*

Several classes likely have a focus appropriate to civic engagement. However, there is no systematic monitoring of such activities nor is there an inventory of these activities.

*A focus on civic engagement in First Year courses*

*A focus on civic engagement in Senior Year or Capstone courses*

Civic engagement is not a prominent feature of either of these programs. First year experiences may include a component focused on civic engagement but, like GE courses it is not visible to students or coordinated at a campus level. The capstone courses are handled department by department and vary widely.

### *Teaching and Learning*

*Democratic teaching styles (encouraging critical thinking, taking independent positions and supporting them, not simply agreeing with the faculty member's point of view, providing opportunities to challenge others in respectful ways)*

The Center for Teaching and Learning offers a variety of courses for faculty members including courses designed to enhance student engagement although not specifically civic engagement.

### *Diversity programs*

The campus has several resources related to diversity including the Multi-cultural Center, which "sponsors 50-70 programs a year". Unfortunately, the website is out of date and does not show current events.

### *Leadership programs*

Anecdotal evidence suggests several programs have components related to leadership development although at this time there is not a "Leadership" program.

### *Problem-based learning*

There is no repository of information about problem-based learning activities. While there is anecdotal evidence that it is used there is no way to document this at this time.

### *Service learning components of courses*

The service learning program at CSUS is operated through the Office of Community Collaboration (OCC). OCC's 2003-2004 year end report indicates that 38 instructors used SL in 77 different course sections. During the same period, CSUS offered 8,518 course sections using 1,583 individual faculty members. In other words, about 2% of our faculty are known to be using service learning and less than 1% of our courses are known to have a service learning component.

OCC also reports that during 2003-2004 2,112 students took part in a service experience. However, for the fall 2004 CASPER poll, 39% of students indicated they had participated in community service as part of a class and the SNAPS 2003 survey reported that 19% of students indicated they had participated in a service learning project. The significant difference in numbers may be due to differences in language and understanding of the terms service learning and community service. There may also be many faculty using service learning approaches who are not working formally with the OCC. It could also be that the CASPER and SNAPS questions cover the entirety of a student's academic experience. Overall though, CSUS seniors are statistically significantly less likely to participate in community service or volunteering than seniors in the CSU system, graduate students, or the NSEE national sample (NSEE 2002 Summary Report).

Interest in service learning continues to grow with 15-20 individuals participating regularly in a Service Learning Faculty group. OCC has also trained 25-30 faculty per year for the past seven years.

### *Student internships, practicums*

Our ability to discern the "civic" nature of internships of our students is quite limited. A good indicator, albeit dated, was the [1997 CASPER question](#) series. At that point, 6% of our students

had participated in a California state government internship and 30% were interested in doing so. In [fall 2004](#) 54% of students indicated they were interested in some type of internship or fieldwork (not specifically political or civic) but only 19% had participated in one.

### *Student Experiential Learning*

#### *Other experiential parts of courses*

There is no repository of information for other types of experiential learning contained in courses.

### *Programs*

#### *Programs that foster civic engagement?*

CSUS is home to many Centers and Institutes with roots in the community. One example is The Center for California Studies which houses several programs. The Senate, Assembly, Executive and Judicial Fellowships are based there as is Legi-school, a program that engages some 2,000 high school students in conversations about important public policy questions with government officials. The Faculty Fellows program connects CSU faculty members with public organizations requiring sophisticated policy analysis. The Center also hosts a variety of events focused on California government and policy and has hosted high profile events such as the gubernatorial debate (with related faculty workshops) that occurred during the 2003 recall election.

The Center for California Studies is one example but many others provide services to community schools, organizations and leaders. Some are more explicitly connected to politics such as the Serna Center; others have relationships with local schools connecting college students with K-12 schools. Colleges and departments have myriad relationships with the community.

### **A note about faculty**

A review of course offerings is insufficient without further understanding of the current faculty. A rare and significant [faculty transition](#) has been occurring at CSUS. In fall 2000 some 551 faculty had tenure and 156 were on a tenure track. By fall 2003, the number of tenured faculty had fallen to 490 while those on the tenure track had double to 329 ([CSUS Institutional Research](#)). Some percentage of these new faculty will likely be granted tenure and make their careers at CSUS, in addition more retirements are likely in the next 10 years reinvigorating the faculty pool even more. This period provides a brief and very unique window to define the culture of expectations for faculty that may well define the institution for the next 2-3 decades.

In 1999 faculty were asked to rate their departments efforts to incorporate community service into the classroom. While 40% rated the efforts as excellent to good, 41% rated them as fair to poor. Interestingly, 13% thought the question was not applicable to their department.

### **Summary**

It appears that students have only limited mechanisms for understanding and accessing existing civic engagement opportunities. There is essentially no centralized location that captures course level activities and internships are managed in a variety of settings ranging from OCC to the Co-op office to individual departments. The widely varying data on participation rates in service learning demonstrate confusion over terminology and our incomplete picture of current activities. The turnover in faculty provides a unique opportunity to make long lasting changes in culture, should that be desired.

## Part Three: Co-Curricular Focus on Civic Engagement

### *Where can civic engagement activities be found in the co-curricular life on campus?*

This campus is dominated by the notion that it is a “commuter campus” and most research seems to bear that out. The 2003 SNAPS survey indicates 72% of our students are employed and they work an average of 25 hours a week in addition to a course load average of 13 units, a much higher rate of outside work than their counterparts at other CSU campuses or the NSEE sample.

As part of its planning and assessment process, CSUS has a goal in of increasing “student involvement in the campus community through encouraging participation in cultural, arts, athletics, academic and extracurricular activities.”

### *Student government*

CSUS has an active student government although there have been some challenges in recent times. Turnout for elections is generally quite low but a ballot measure in spring 2004 generated the highest turnout to date with 5,000 students voting (approximately a 19% turnout). The ballot measure asked students whether they favored raising fees to help pay for a new Wellness and Recreation Center and 55% of students supported the measure. Turnout is usually lower, ranging from 8 percent in 1996 to 13% in 2002. The fall 2004 online election was hoped to generate additional turnout but only 5.07% of eligible students voted, barely over the minimum required for the vote to be considered valid.

### *Student clubs and organizations*

Approximately 20% of students surveyed participated in clubs or groups on campus; nearly a quarter of students are “not interested” at all while almost half say they have no time for the activities (SNAPS 2003). The SNAPS report also indicates that the amount of time spent on campus activities is minimal for most students. Of the 20% of undergraduates who spend time on campus related activities, 11% spend only 1-2 hours per week. For graduate students, 11% are involved in campus activities but 7% spend 1-2 hours per week. Overall undergraduate participation in co-curricular activities is less significantly less than either graduate students or students in the NSEE national sample.

### *Fraternity and sorority organizations*

There is no on campus Greek housing and 6% of students are members of fraternities or sororities.

### *Residence halls*

Approximately 1,100 students live on campus and part of the Destination 2010 plan is to expand on campus housing to 5,000 students.

### *Student newspaper*

The campus newspaper, the Hornet, is published weekly and covers student elections, extracurricular activities and campus events.

## **Summary**

Many opportunities seem to exist but student participation in extra-curricular activities remains fairly limited, possibly a result of competing family and work obligations.

### Audit conclusions

The audit of civic engagement at CSUS did not reveal an extensive existing (and documented) commitment to civic engagement. Several themes emerged. First, we do not have sufficient information gathering for many activities. While reporting alone is not sufficient, anecdotal evidence indicates there are many activities occurring that are not captured in our existing data sources. Second, definitions of civic engagement vary widely; some have very unclear concepts, others have limited descriptions and still others allow nearly anything to fall under the definition. Finally, the campus has not created a systemic culture of engagement, students participate in community service, volunteering, service learning, campus elections and extracurricular activities at low rates compared to their peers.

While there is not extensive activity that is clearly linked to civic engagement, there are several promising opportunities. First, the identification of community engagement as one of the three selected focal points for the WASC accreditation signals interest on the part of campus decision makers. Second, definitions of community and civic engagement seem to be somewhat unfocused; the benefit of this is that no one seems to be firmly embracing notions which would be antithetical to a civic engagement focus. There is significant room left for a full discussion of what civic engagement is and how it might look on our campus. Third, the vast majority of the campus leadership is new bringing renewed energy to defining our campus. Finally, the significant turnover in faculty provides a rare opportunity to create a culture of engagement that will last for several decades.

### Next steps

The next step in the ADP process is to create a planning group which will meet over the course of the spring to determine the best course of action for CSUS.