Shifting the Paradigm: Re-conceptualizing Civic Engagement to Promote Equitable, Sustainable Partnerships and Student Growth

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• Comprehensive regional state university, 18 miles north of Boston
• 7,346 undergraduate and 1,655 graduate students
• 70% of undergraduates qualify for financial aid, 40% of which receive Pell grants
• 35% of undergraduates self-identify as students of color

The Center for Civic Engagement

• Officially launched in 2015
• Serves as nexus for community-based initiatives and civically-engaged learning at Salem State to promote civic engagement, social justice, and connection to place
• Civic responsibility is a strategic position in SSU’s Strategic Plan
Why the Paradigm Shift? Why Now?

Service-Learning → Critically-Engaged Civic Learning

- The challenging term: service-learning
- A history of terms
- The public purpose and civic mission of higher education
- Publically-engaged scholars and the aim of social change
- A commitment to democratic engagement
- HIPs and retention: the academic mission of higher education
- Civic learning objectives and assessment
- Tough times and tight resources
- The success of the student, the community, our future
Critically-Engaged Civic Learning

**Characteristics**
- Social Issue of Discipline
- Challenge Injustice
- Root Cause of Social Issue
- Social Change
- Authentic Relationships
- Power Redistribution
- Equity
- Reciprocity
- Common language
- Community Goals
- Inclusive, Collaborative, Problem-Oriented
- Co-create & Leverage Knowledges
- Asset-Based
- Civic and Democratic Knowledge
- Intellectual Skills
- Applied Competencies
- Social and Political Values
- Co-designed Actions
- Iterative Process
- Contextualize Experience
- Feedback
- Long-Term Approach
- Civic Ecology
- Participatory Democracy

**Guiding Principles**
- Social Justice
- Power Dynamics
- Community-Based
- Civic Learning Objectives
- Reflexivity
- Sustainability

**Outcomes**
- Social change
- Increased awareness of civic agency
- Increased self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-empowerment
- Workforce preparation
- Improved student and community member success
- Better understanding of community
Professional Development

Current
- Civic Engagement Institute
- Faculty Learning Community
- Community Breakfasts
- Civic Learning Conference

Future
- CE Cohort Program
- CE Mentorship Program
- CE Network Initiative
Salem YMCA GreenSpace

- Located in an under-resourced neighborhood, behind a school, and next to subsidized housing for older adults
- Run by teens and community volunteers
- Provides produce to volunteers and community members at no cost through a weekly farmers market
- Provides educational opportunities for community members and leadership opportunities for youth
- Promotes community-building in a diverse neighborhood
SOC 349: Health, Illness, and the Body

- Fall 2016 and Summer 2017
- Explore cultural conceptions of health, well-being, and illness
- Identify and examine social determinants of health and health disparities
- Participate in various GreenSpace activities
  - Planting and harvesting
  - Working at the weekly farmers market
  - Building raised garden beds
  - Creating a bilingual community cookbook
Experiencing GreenSpace
Critically-Engaged Civic Learning

• Social Justice
  – Students identify root causes of health disparities
  – Students examine possibilities for social change

• Power Dynamics
  – High school students educate and lead
  – Work promotes campus-community relationships
  – Project decisions are made together

• Community-Based
  – GreenSpace identifies needs and goals
  – Project builds on community assets
Critically-Engaged Civic Learning

• Civic Learning Objectives
  – Students understand culturally diverse conceptualizations of health, well-being, and illness
  – Students recognize causes and consequences of health disparities
  – Students and volunteers feel efficacious and empowered to promote change in their own communities

• Reflexivity
  – GreenSpace work is contextualized
  – Students and volunteers reflect on experiences together, throughout the semester, with an eye toward change

• Sustainability
  – Reflection encourages thoughtful planning for future work
  – Work expands to other campus departments and the City of Salem
Questions?

For more information, visit:

https://www.salemstate.edu/civicengagement
https://salemygreenspace.wordpress.com/