University System of Maryland: Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

In April 2017, the University System of Maryland (USM) Board of Regents charged a Civic Education Workgroup to make recommendations for system-wide initiatives to help our students graduate as more active and effective citizens. The group’s mission was focused on civic education, civic engagement, and civic responsibility.

The work was grounded in research on national models from higher education associations and best practices across states, systems, and institutions. In addition, USM conducted a survey of all USM institutions to collect information about current practice and ongoing initiatives, and to gain a better understanding of the work, accomplishments, and challenges facing USM institutions as they deliver on the promise of graduating educated and engaged citizens for a changing world. In May 2018, the USM Board of Regents approved the following recommendations of the Civic Education Workgroup:

1. Foster an ethos of civic engagement and participation across all parts of all institutions and throughout the educational culture.
   - Encourage Carnegie Community Engagement classification for all institutions in USM. Consider offering incentives through partnership grants for institutions to help each other (those that have earned classification can help institutions that are on the path).
   - Encourage voting by using the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) data to document and assess progress toward higher voter participation from each institution. Share reports with USM office.
   - Consider the development of a “badge” to designate student level competencies in civic learning and democratic engagement.
   - Create a mechanism, such as a “Civic Investment Plan” that captures and sets forth plans to strengthen significant institutional commitment to civic learning and civic engagement and details resources being used and resources needed.

2. Identify civic literacy as a core expectation for all students.
   - Expand opportunities for service/action learning for undergraduate students in all majors to engage in real world applications of their learning through coursework and through community leadership programs.
   - Expand opportunities for civic learning and engagement for graduate students as it applies to their programs of study.
   - Align civic learning and democratic engagement goals with Carnegie Community Engagement standards, and have institutions report progress toward agreed upon goals.
   - Establish the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Workgroup as an ongoing USM workgroup with responsibility for defining goals (in collaboration with institutions), developing and analyzing a System-wide survey, and overseeing the progress toward goals.
   - Consider establishing a Regents’ “designated priorities” fund for awarding seed grants to institutions to implement the civic learning and civic engagement recommendations.

Types and number of institutions impacted by this initiative/policy

The University System of Maryland is the state’s public university system, comprised of 12 USM institutions. The civic education and civic engagement policies fall under the USM Board of Regents governance responsibility. Civic education initiatives at USM have indirect impact on the broader higher education community in Maryland, including the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), and the Maryland Independent Colleges and Universities Association (MICUA).

When the initiative/policy started
In April 2017, USM hosted a state-wide Symposium, “Civic Education, Civic Engagement and Civic Responsibility: Foundation of a Democratic Society,” featuring Senator Barbara Mikulski as the keynote speaker. To broaden participation, the symposium was co-sponsored by MHEC, MACC, and MICUA, and was attended by state leaders at every level. The Symposium launched a major policy initiative at USM.

Current activities of the initiative
Steering Committee: The Steering Committee of the USM Civic Education/Civic Engagement USM Workgroup oversees the work of the sub committees and ensures the dissemination of the sub-committee recommendations to the relevant constituencies at their institutions.
Voting & Census: The Subcommittee on Voter Registration and Participation researches, identifies, and shares best practices in campus voter registration efforts, initiating institutional partnerships in support of voter registration and engaging institutions in the 2020 Census. The subcommittee will identify and describe a menu of promising practices to encourage voter registration and participation, and ways USM can support these efforts.
Carnegie Classification and Recognition: The Subcommittee on Carnegie Classification of Community Engagement identifies USM institutions interested in pursuing the classification and supports the procedural and organizational elements for successful applications. The subcommittee supports opportunities for self-study and recognition to raise the level of civic engagement on campuses. The subcommittee will facilitate collaborative mentorships between institutions and identify ways USM can support the process.
Curriculum Integration: The Subcommittee on Curriculum Integration researches and identifies best practices in integrating civic responsibility, democratic engagement, and community-based learning into undergraduate and graduate majors and programs. The subcommittee initiates institutional partnerships to advance these efforts, develops a menu of strategies for institutions, and identifies other ways USM can support campus work.

Future and emerging activities of the initiative
The work of the sub-committees is ongoing and reports annually to the Board of Regents. The sub-committees will foster, support and collect information on campus-level activities and progress toward goals.

For more information, see www.usmd.edu/usm/academicaffairs/civic-engagement/ or contact Nancy Shapiro, PhD, Associate Vice Chancellor, University System of Maryland, nshapiro@usmd.edu