

Civic Engagement in the General Education Curriculum: A Proposal

Civic Engagement

The ability of students to participate knowledgeably and actively in the public life of their communities. This is demonstrated by the ability of students to:

- Connect their learning to the social, civic, ethical, and environmental issues of the larger community
- Exhibit interest in and knowledge of contemporary matters of public importance
- Identify the civic and ethical responsibilities of people in specific fields and professions
- Engage in public discourse and exercise civic imagination
- Acquire skills for participatory democracy by completing a civic experiential learning project (service learning, community-based research, or social action project)

Implementation

Courses will be accepted for inclusion in this category based on addressing one or more of these learning outcomes in a significant way (that is, over a third of the course). Courses meeting the civic experiential learning outcome will be noted on students' transcripts. It is expected that courses identified for this goal will fulfill other distribution requirements. Therefore this goal will not add any additional credit requirements to the General Education program.

Rationale

The proposed General Education goal of civic engagement carries out the wishes of the University Senate from its April 2004 meeting at which it approved recommendations from the Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Experiential Learning report to revise General Education goals "to include a goal addressing the importance of civic engagement." Specifically, it reads:

"All graduates of UND [should be] prepared to participate knowledgeably and actively in the public life of the community."

The report identified implementation strategies of providing opportunities for students to "bring their learning to bear on social, civic, and ethical issues in the larger community" and of noting coursework devoted to learning by engaging with the community on transcripts.

UND joins other campuses and higher education associations in this interest in civic engagement. A Wingspread conference considered the issue of the civic responsibility of research universities (http://www.compact.org/initiatives/research_universities/wingspread_declaration) while Campus Compact (in which UND holds membership) has initiated a "History, Civics, and Service" project, the Association of American Colleges and Universities issued a report that called for an undergraduate curriculum creating responsible learners who are active participants as citizens of a diverse democracy (<http://www.greaterexpectations.org/>) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has added a "community engagement" elective category. Many institutions have committed themselves to various forms of engagement, citizenship, and democratic renewal in general education or multiple venues. A small sample of these national discussions are attached for their relevance to this proposal.