

# EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

Civic Action Plan *Fall 2017*



Eastern Connecticut State University has come a long way from the days of mandatory residence hall service with little student understanding of the impact of their volunteer efforts. Students now have significant opportunities for volunteerism and service learning, and these efforts are coordinated with community needs in mind. Students, faculty and administrators have an increased commitment to meeting the civic, economic and educational needs of our community both locally and more broadly. Eastern's Strategic Plan includes commitments to community engagement and to contributing to students' academic success in the local school system. Eastern has received awards and attributes for these efforts, including the Carnegie Foundation's Classification for Community Engagement and the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. Impact in the community and on students is regularly assessed by the Center for Community Engagement and through the University's strategic planning process.

Eastern is poised to take the next meaningful steps towards becoming a civically engaged institution. Community engagement is established as a cornerstone of Eastern's values and mission. More than half of Eastern students participate in organized community service and service learning during their time as students, contributing more than 20,000 hours each year. Faculty see the value of engaged learning in their courses and are committed to creating opportunities for their students to apply what they are learning in their classes to real-life experiences in the community. By institutionalizing civic engagement, Eastern will not only meet the needs and interests of our students but will be known for the practical application of its liberal arts mission.

Developing a sustainable civic engagement practice also supports the University's commitment to preparing students for successful careers and advanced study. Many of the "Essential Learning Outcomes" developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) are integrated into civic engagement and civic action work. Knowledge of cultures and intellectual and practical skills are built into service learning experiences. Personal and social responsibility, including civic knowledge and engagement, and intercultural knowledge and competence, are critical elements of a quality civic engagement experience.

## VISION/ MISSION

In addition to the AAC&U learning outcomes, the Eight Essential Career-Readiness Competencies identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) have particular relevance in expanded civic engagement experiences. Critical thinking, oral and written communications, teamwork, leadership, professionalism and career management, as well as intercultural fluency are all competencies that Eastern students gain through civic engagement. Eastern's Civic Action Plan will support and complement students' academic and non-academic experiences that result in a well-rounded, career-ready graduate.

In order to achieve this next step, Eastern faculty will take the lead in providing rigorous, challenging and civically engaged experiences for students. To that end, Eastern will support its faculty and students by developing institutional structures, faculty incentives and academic programs that tie civic engagement to the academic mission of the University. These initiatives will help distinguish Eastern in this competitive and economically challenging environment and will secure its place in Connecticut higher education for years to come.

As Connecticut's public liberal arts university, Eastern is committed to civic engagement. "Engagement, inquiry, integrity and social responsibility" are not only core values at Eastern, they are our community practices. We apply knowledge in practical settings. As noted in our mission statement, Eastern prepares students for "their future personal, professional and public roles, as leaders in both their communities and professional fields."

To develop an education that is "practically applied," Eastern's community cultivates undergraduate research, internships, community service and experiential learning.

These values and these practices are at the foundation of this Civic Action Plan constructed to increase and reinforce the institutionalization of Civic Engagement at Eastern.



Civic Engagement is defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as:

*“working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” (Excerpted from Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000, Preface, page vi.)”*  
*In addition, civic engagement encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community.”*

Eastern’s Civic Action Plan is constructed around two important objectives. The first objective is to develop civic engagement through volunteering in the community, service learning and community-based civic action internships. The second objective is to reinforce the institutionalization of civic engagement by creating a civic engagement committee, including civic engagement in the tenure and promotion package, and developing a minor in civic engagement.

The Civic Action Plan will advance the five commitments of the 30th Anniversary Action Statement:

- **We empower** our students, faculty, staff and community partners to co-create mutually respectful partnerships in pursuit of a just, equitable and sustainable future for communities beyond the campus – nearby and around the world.
- **We prepare** our students for lives of engaged citizenship, with the motivation and capacity to deliberate, act and lead in pursuit of the public good.
- **We embrace** our responsibilities as place-based institutions, contributing to the health and strength of our communities – economically, socially, environmentally, educationally and politically.
- **We harness** the capacity of our institutions – through research, teaching, partnerships and institutional practice – to challenge the prevailing social and economic inequalities that threaten our democratic future.
- **We foster** an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.

## APPROACH

Eastern is an important institution regionally bringing many talented faculty, staff and students to engage in meaningful ways in the Windham/Willimantic region. The Center for Community Engagement and the Center for Internships and Career Development support and promote civic engagement both in the local community and in the State of Connecticut. The Liberal Arts Work Program provides students with opportunities to engage in a pre-professional experience that is designed to help clarify career goals, develop skills in a real-world setting, and prepare for future employment or graduate school. Academic departments connect students to community-based internships, practica and other field experiences.

### First Objective: Developing a Sustainable Civic Engagement Practice

The first objective of the Civic Action Plan is to increase the engagement of faculty, students and staff with the Windham/Willimantic community and to develop a culture of working for the public good. The objective is to maintain and develop the sustainable partnership developed with the community to promote the well-being of every participant.

**Strategy: Expand Service Learning and Community Engagement at Eastern**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Implementation Timeline</b>
Create or identify existing database of service learning course curricula (e.g. Campus Compact) and engaged department research	Database in Sharepoint or on Eastern website for ease of use	Fall 2018
Collaborate with undergraduate research to support faculty/student research in community	Undergraduate research includes projects that take place in the local community	Fall 2018
Create forum for faculty to learn about community needs	Create “Listen and Learn” opportunities	Spring 2018
Capture faculty projects and publicize	Fall conference, lunch events to share work	Fall 2018
Use Honor Roll as tool for gathering information from faculty	More faculty provide data on community -based projects	Fall 2018
Train faculty and teacher assistants on civic discourse process	Expanded capability to raise and discuss community issues, mobilize around an identified community need	Fall 2018
Identify funding for faculty compensation for Service Learning courses	Advertise faculty development grants, curriculum development grants	Fall 2018
Connect Service Learning to LAW initiative	Service learning courses receive LAW designation	Spring 2018
Research other national supports for service learning, e.g., American Humanics	Create one credit Intro to Service Learning course	Spring 2018
Utilize the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) as pathway for student engagement in community	CCE to continue outreach to faculty, encouraging student participation in CCE programming as element of course pedagogy, civic action internship placements	Spring 2018
Increase # of community-based, civic action internships	Provide community resources to Center for Internships and Career Development and academic departments	Spring 2018
Investigate interest in “Second Year Experience” service learning courses		Spring 2018

**Second Objective: Reinforcing the Institutionalization of Civic Engagement**

The second objective of the Civic Action Plan is to reinforce the institutionalization of civic engagement by working on Eastern policies to institutionalize and sustain a culture of working for the public good.

Reinforcing the institutionalization of civic engagement embraces the fifth statement of the 30th Anniversary Action stating that: “We foster an environment that consistently affirms the centrality of the public purposes of higher education by setting high expectations for members of the campus community to contribute to their achievement.”

**Strategy: Create Interdisciplinary Minor in Civic Engagement**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Implementation Timeline</b>
Research other programs	Ensure we are not overlapping/ competing with CCSU, other CSCU programs	Spring 2018
Identify department to serve as Minor’s “home”	Faculty from identified department will work with Civic Teaching, Learning and Research Committee to develop program model and write proposal to Curriculum Committee	Completed Fall 2017
Identify student interest in minor	CCE will survey students to gauge interest	Fall 2017
Create proposal to Curriculum Committee	Proposal submitted during fall, 2018 semester for Fall, 2019	Fall 2018

**Strategy: Develop Committee on Community Engaged Teaching, Learning and Research**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Implementation Timeline</b>
Work with administration, Senate to develop committee, either through the University Senate or as part of Liberal Arts Work Committee	Committee will support engaged teaching, learning and research	Spring 2018/Fall 2018
Hire University Assistant to support task force and committee work	Committee will have a dedicated support person to ensure that the goals are accomplished	Spring 2018
Research other institutions (COPLAC, CCSU) senate committees	Evidence-based report on senate committees	Spring 2018
Identify focus of committee’s work same		Spring 2018

Committee will conduct benchmarking	Using established benchmarking tools, committee will assess the breadth and depth of civic engagement	Benchmarking completed by end of Summer 2018
Committee will set goals for civic engagement	Investigate anchor institution responsibilities, indicators and outcomes	Research completed by end of Fall 2018

**Strategy: Recognize and Reward Engaged Learning and Scholarship**

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Implementation Timeline</b>
Utilize CCSU model for expanding criteria for promotion and tenure to include civic engagement	Faculty work in engaged teaching, learning and research is recognized and included as element of promotion and tenure	Fall 2018
Encourage a culture of grant writing for service learning research and projects	Additional funds available for expansion of service learning at Eastern	Ongoing

**COMMUNICATION**

During the past two years the Center for Community Engagement has created a unique media model that can serve as the functional core for the implementation of the Civic Action Plan, providing continuous support for all levels of communication, internal (institutional) and external (community).



To our knowledge this model is not only unique, it is the only one of its kind currently in use in our state. It could be replicated with appropriate variations at other CSU institutions to create a statewide network for sharing content within the system, with the public, and with all other stakeholders.

This section of the Civic Action Plan has two elements. The first will connect and integrate the CCE media model into the design and function of the plan. The second will offer suggestions for how this media toolbox can fully support the implementation of the plan. It provides specific examples of previous investments and the successful use of this model during the past 2½ years by the Center for Community Engagement. Many examples with web links are provided for review and consideration of future use of this media toolbox to serve Eastern and the people in our region.

### **Integrated Media to Support the Plan Design and Function**

The purpose of the Center for Community Engagement media toolbox is to give life to what is learned and practically applied—to realize, document and share the values and practices identified in this plan.

Strategic use of this resource will advance the identified commitments, objectives and strategies of the 30th Anniversary Action Statement. It will help all participants with the successful completion of many action steps. Over time the effective use of these media tools will co-create a central nervous system for Eastern that will be as important and valuable as its physical structure.

The creation and sharing of appropriate media content and messaging, internally and externally, is a powerful means to ensure a clear public understanding and appreciation of the continuing value and viability of Eastern at all levels of operation. In a challenging and difficult economic, social and political environment this offers real preservation of our good work and protection for survival in an uncertain future.

Specific options for using media to achieve objectives and commitments include the following:

#### **First Objective: Development of Sustainable Engagement Practice**

- Storytelling about existing partnerships and practice can maintain connections and expand them for future efforts, perhaps with other collaborators with common interests. When financial resources are limited leveraging action and human energy can make a difference.
- Internal sharing of existing stories can inspire and encourage students, faculty and staff to consider how they can contribute in new ways and increase total institutional performance.
- Recording meetings, special events and interviews (archiving) can capture important valuable information and experiences that others may not know or access. Content in one area of activity might be applied (cross-fertilized) elsewhere in ways that could be innovative or surprising when manifested.
- Peer communication and story sharing within groups, student, faculty or staff, allows for increased open dialogue and exchange about the urgent need to do more, to be more creative, to not take existing resources for granted, and for expanding thinking and action from the group-level to Eastern and ultimately to the people and communities we serve.
- Translating static data and printed information from various projects into shared media stories can engage others more compellingly and meaningfully. The experts need to make their research and final products more relevant and useful to much larger audiences. This will contribute significantly to increased public understanding and appreciate of all the good work being done with state-based and other investments.



## Second Objective: Reinforce the Institutionalization of Engagement:

Setting high standards and expectations for all engagement participants requires a proof-of-concept approach and a proof-of-performance ethic. Media must not only show outcomes and results it must show the processes and methods that created them. Doing this allows others not yet connected to engagement to consider their work and focus area with the precious *gift of knowledge from prior experience* as a guide and map for their efforts. This is the path of education, practice, assessment and reconfiguration brought to life in the form of service innovation.

This is how the most critical aspect of this plan can be explained and justified—the awareness of the heart of what engagement means and represents for the future of Eastern, how critical it is to proactively prove the value of continued state investment in *a liberal education, practically applied*.

- Research work with surveys and other data collection methods can be supported or supplemented with forums and meetings that can be recorded, shared and archived for future reference.
- Engagement Task Force meetings should be recorded, posted and shared to reach as many people as possible, internally and externally. Showing the process itself as it develops and grows will demonstrate good faith transparency, and continuing institutional performance to manifest the plan in ongoing practice.
- Storytelling about faculty efforts and results will document their work and provide valuable media material for consideration of tenure and promotion. The same can apply to staff.
- Storytelling about student activity and results will document their work and provide valuable media portfolio material for consideration of future study and employment.
- Using the media toolbox for comprehensive and coordinated storytelling of engagement and other Eastern activity also provides powerful material for recruitment and retention of all elements of the campus community—students, faculty and staff.
- Engagement with community groups that can help spread the word about the work that is being done at Eastern, including Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, AAUW and others.

One important consideration for the implementation of the Civic Action Plan is the dedication of a staff position to oversee and manage its implementation throughout all levels of campus activity and to communicate all related efforts with the community through available media channels.

A core function could be to audit and assess all current engagement activity, research and develop new activity in areas not yet engaged, and use media to communicate everything internally and externally. This position could oversee the communication section of the plan, working with all appropriate university faculty, staff and students and all present and potential new community partners.

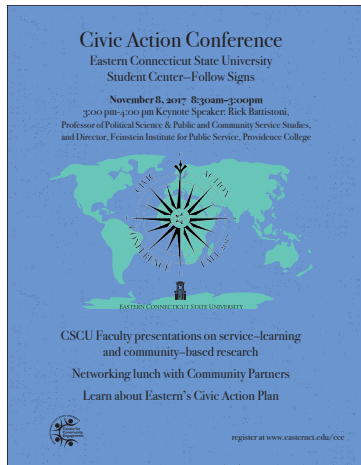
Such a position would require a unique and specialized mix of skills and experience, including (1) academic/teaching experience to work with faculty, (2) a history of engagement activity and support with direct experience with community collaborations, and (3) a wide range of media production and distribution skills across all local channels and platforms. There could be many applicants for any one area but finding someone that can handle all three equally well would be a critical part of the function of this position. Creating such a position is one important way to ensure success with the plan and demonstrate to the public and stakeholders that Eastern is manifesting excellence, service and proving through words and deeds the value of a liberal education in our society.

### **Suggestions for Implementation and Examples of Previous Media Service by the Center for Community Engagement**

Listed below are sources of media content in various local channels that document prior activity by the Center for Community Engagement. The CCE website is the hub and core for all engagement media content: *www.easternct.edu*. There is a wealth of information to supplement what is offered below.

Sources for this content and modes of distribution include:

- WECS Radio at Eastern
- TV Channel 195 at Eastern
- Charter Cable Public Access TV Channel 192
- The Campus Lantern
- Neighbors, a regional newspaper/magazine
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Social Media/Facebook, Instagram, etc.



## 2016 CCE Civic Action Conference Videos

On November 18, 2016, the Center for Community Engagement sponsored a conference on faculty engagement and service learning in the Student Center. The focus was on sharing current faculty activity, recruiting new faculty participation, and aligning this effort with the Civic Action Plan. Thirteen faculty presentations were recorded and archived on YouTube for anyone to learn more about how Eastern connects academic learning with our community. The link is below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLW5WLT18OaAfU7Q2Vx-ZUoR4Jqt41U8Ymc&v=oG\\_c61VRFcQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLW5WLT18OaAfU7Q2Vx-ZUoR4Jqt41U8Ymc&v=oG_c61VRFcQ)

The Second CCE Civic Action Conference took place on November 8, 2017, at Eastern.

## CCE/Faculty/Student Community Engagement Videos

The links below will take you to unique local stories about the people and organizations that are working hard to improve the quality of life in our region. Videos were produced by students working together in a video production class taught by Professor Denise Matthews from the Communication Department at Eastern. This effort was facilitated and co-managed by the CCE. Links to the CCE YouTube Channel:

1. CLiCK—Commercially Licensed Co-operative Kitchen  
<https://youtu.be/KanG7y6tv1M>
2. Grow Windham  
<https://youtu.be/YJQgyqxsWmA>
3. Joshua's Trust  
[https://youtu.be/PUrAe4\\_SyyY](https://youtu.be/PUrAe4_SyyY)
4. Parent & Community University/Windham Public Schools  
<https://youtu.be/YK9oDlpQk6g>
5. Third Thursday Street Fest  
[https://youtu.be/PdTsxH6-\\_w](https://youtu.be/PdTsxH6-_w)
6. WECS Radio at Eastern  
<https://youtu.be/32HlilnDoag>
7. The Willimantic Ride Along  
<https://youtu.be/JE67Z9FtkMs>

A playlist with the complete video collection:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw1r6nX7fPZceD9AJYGETzO0MOr3SoHU1>

### WECS Radio—Eastern TV Channel 195 Community Engagement Interviews

In the fall of 2016 a series of radio/TV simulcasts was created to provide continuing coverage of community engagement activity with students, faculty and regional collaboration partners. Interviews were produced live at WECS, Eastern's radio station and recorded for TV by staff at Media Services. Content was posted on YouTube and a link to the series follows:

*<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLW5WLT18OaAccZQX21UsgbkGVXfrYfs0w>*

As you can see from these examples, the media model developed at the CCE provides a unique and valuable public service in its present form. This work has been accomplished with limited resources and available staff time. The stories that have been shared inform people about the significant contributions that are made every year by students and staff at the CCE working hand in hand with faculty in departments across the university.

Each year more than 1,000 students devote more than 20,000 hours of service to more than 40 local schools and community service organizations. Using the current IRS valuation for volunteer service, this represents almost \$500,000 of additional return to taxpayers for their investment in liberal arts education at Eastern.

This plan offers the possibility of an expansion of the CCE media engine for storytelling and community service to support the quality of life in our region. A modest investment by Eastern into the development of this effort to support the Civic Action Plan will provide continuing returns in the future for the institution and the family it represents—and for the people of the State of Connecticut.