

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### CIVIC ACTION AT CONCORDIA COLLEGE

Since 2004, the theme of our core curriculum, becoming responsibly engaged in the world (BREW), has ensured that a Concordia education imparts upon students the importance of meaningful engagement with local and global communities. This engagement takes the form of service-learning, community-based research and internships, volunteering (individually and with student organizations, athletic teams, music ensembles, and the like), and leadership in social justice efforts on campus and beyond. During these community-based projects our students communicate with and work alongside people, groups and organizations within our community to meet social and community needs. Because of these efforts, students experience enhanced learning and development, are better prepared for careers and professional experiences, and are well equipped to be future leaders in their personal, professional, and civic lives. Working collaboratively with partners in our local and global community, we ensure benefits are realized for both our students and the communities they serve.

As Concordia concludes its strategic plan *Whole Self, Whole Life, Whole World,* a number of key strategic initiatives have coalesced to affirm and deepen our commitment to community and civic engagement:

- A diversity initiative guided by the following declaration: "As an American liberal arts college
  founded by immigrants, as a college of the church, Concordia will seek out, include, and honor a
  greater diversity of peoples and ideas, knowing that such action will change campus culture, ways
  of learning, and responsible engagement in the world."
- An ongoing and deeply enriching integrative learning environment that transcends the traditional course/credit unit and supports enhanced experiential learning. Students will venture beyond the classroom, work alongside persons or groups wrestling with complex situations, problems and challenges and construct responses to these situations, problems and challenges. PEAKs, pivotal experiences in applied knowledge, engage students meaningfully with complex problems on campus and in local, national and international communities.
- Integration of global learning from students' first year forward, including sustained engagement with the local global on campus and in the Fargo-Moorhead community, so that students understand and embrace the call to national and global citizenship.
- A career initiative that is integrated through student's four years at the college and beyond, prepares students for reflection on career and vocation, ensures students connect their liberal arts education to career preparation, and provides opportunities for our students to engage with our alumni.
- Strategic commitment to lead students into lifelong reflection on their identity, purpose, and engagement in the world and to model for students in the work of faculty and staff a vision and practice that puts the examined life at the center of their collegiate experience.

- Adoption of a Climate Change Commitment and a vision for sustainability that commits to embracing "a concern for sustainability that is rooted in the responsibility to ensure the environmental, economic, and social health of the college and of our global community."
- Commitment to practice interfaith cooperation "because of [Concordia's] Lutheran dedication to prepare thoughtful and informed global citizens who foster wholeness and hope, build peace through understanding, and serve the world together."

Concordia will more effectively achieve all of these strategic initiatives – *integrative learning, diversity, sustainability, campus ministry and interfaith cooperation, global learning,* and *career and vocation preparation* — if we affirm our commitment to community and civic engagement as a central tenet of a Concordia education. The education we offer at Concordia is increasingly connected to the larger community, and to developing students into community and civic leaders who engage responsibly in the world. The health of our democracy depends on this kind of education. In order to successfully achieve our aims, Concordia needs to enhance the infrastructure, support and coordination of its work with community engagement, including building of partnerships with the local and global community, and it must value and uphold the civic engagement work of our faculty, students, and staff. This work will be guided by these overarching goals:

- We will promote civic education, the cultivation of civic skills, responsible community engagement, and self-reflection across the curriculum and across the college.
- We will prepare students for lives of responsible citizenship and conscientious vocational practices.
- We will promote ethical, democratic, and just community engagement strategies.
- We will build and maintain cooperative partnerships with groups and organizations in our community.

#### To accomplish this, we will need:

- 1. An Office of Community Engagement, staffed with a full-time director and administrative support, and with funds necessary to build and sustain meaningful partnerships. The Office will develop and maintain cooperative partnerships with groups and organizations in our community, handle logistics and maintain records for off-campus partnerships, ensure students and faculty attend to issues of ethics, diversity and justice in their community engagement work, and assess the impact of community engagement efforts. In order to successfully integrate PEAK into our curriculum, a considerable focus of this work will be on the local community; however, to be successful in this initiative, our work must include regional, national and international community engagement.
- 2. Resources to expand campus activities that promote civic mindedness and community engagement, such as Hands for Change, Martin Luther King Day events, and student-led sustainability efforts. The college has recently approved a full-day observance of MLK Day, and we hope our observation of the holiday will become a community-wide event. As we enhance community and civic engagement, sustainability efforts will increase in prominence, existing initiatives will be

- enhanced, and new programs will be developed. The college will support opening our campus to the community, developing regular opportunities for community-campus interactions.
- 3. Faculty and staff development for creating revised curricula and co-/extra-curricular experiences with civic and community engagement emphases. These experiences will be in alignment with strategic campus initiatives, affirm engaged scholarship, and provide opportunities for vocational and career reflection. We will support faculty and staff as they develop and revise curricular and co-curricular experiences in alignment with campus-wide IL/PEAK goals. Opportunities will promote ethical, democratic and just community engagement.
- 4. Support for students who undertake community-based projects, including student-faculty collaborative community-based research, engaged scholarship, service learning, and internships. Financial support will allow students to complete community and civic integrative learning projects with organizations that might not otherwise have the financial means to support the students.
- 5. Expansion of study away experiences that include a component of civic and community action. Aligned with recent initiatives in global learning, the college will expand student travel with a commitment to community and civic engagement, including service-oriented PEAK travel experiences. The college will also facilitate participation from a more diverse range of students who wish to undertake travel experiences such as Habitat for Humanity trips and Justice Journeys.

As noted in the Sustainability Vision Statement (2012): "Concordia College is focused on preparing students for their lives as professionals, citizens, and people of faith. Through the shared search for knowledge and understanding, deep conversation about fundamental questions, and careful attention to the pressing issues facing societies and our global community, members of the Concordia community work together to create positive change. Students emerge from the Concordia experience equipped to be responsibly engaged in the world, pursuing their interests and using their talents to live a meaningful life." Through the development of the resources to support community and civic engagement, Concordia will be better equipped to prepare our students to create positive change in the world, while at Concordia and throughout the whole of their lives.

# **CIVIC ACTION PLAN**

#### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In 2016, Campus Compact marked its 30th anniversary as an organization offering support to colleges and universities committed to promoting the public purposes of higher education. With recognition of the significant challenges facing higher education today and heightened debate surrounding its value and purpose, Campus Compact challenged its member institutions across the country to rededicate themselves to the civic functions of education by creating unique plans for heightened community engagement.

Along with the leaders of more than 400 other member schools, Concordia College President William Craft signed onto Campus Compact's 30th Anniversary Action Statement during the 2016-2017 academic year, thus committing our college to the creation of a Civic Action Plan upholding five tenets of public responsibility. They are as follows:

- 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.

The committee commissioned by President Craft to construct Concordia's Civic Action Plan in reference to the broad values and goals put forward by Campus Compact undertook a rigorous agenda of internal and community research in order to identify the strengths, needs, and character of civic engagement within our campus and the needs of our neighbors and community partners as they relate to service and integrative learning opportunities.

Concordia's Civic Action Plan supports the college's existing commitments to civic engagement through its strategic initiatives of Sustainability, Diversity and Inclusion, Interfaith Dialogue, Global Education, and Integrative Learning. The latter initiative is especially reflected by PEAK (Pivotal Experiences in Applied Knowledge), our new requirement which ensures that students will engage in significant and intensive

community-based learning projects. Concordia's Plan articulates ways in which our campus will further become responsibly engaged in the world (or BREW) and enhances our ability to fulfill our college's mission and purpose of influencing the affairs of the world by sending into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life.

Towards these ends, Concordia's Civic Action Plan coalesces around the major themes of:

- 1. enhanced infrastructural supports for community engagement
- 2. cooperative partnerships with our neighbors and organizations within the larger community and the world
- 3. civic education and preparing students for lives of responsible citizenship, and
- 4. enhanced communication across our campus and across strategic initiatives and in reference to the good work taking place amongst our faculty, staff, and students.

This document describes the findings of the Civic Action Plan committee's institutional and community research undertaken during the 2016-17 school year and connects these findings, along with the unique social, moral, and civic character of our school, to the themes listed above and to the unique plan of action which is this document's conclusion. Concordia's Civic Action Plan thus reflects the integrative purposes of a liberal arts education as articulated by our 2012-2017 strategic plan and, as such, promotes the cultivation of responsible citizenship for the development of the *whole self*, over the course of the *whole life*, and for the sake of the *whole world*.

## CONCORDIA COLLEGE

### OUR CAMPUS IN CONTEXT

Concordia College is a small liberal arts college of the ELCA. We are renowned within our local community and within the region surrounding Fargo-Moorhead for excellence in our liberal arts and pre-professional programs and are well known for volunteerism and civic engagement within our curriculum. Our student groups are active in our community and in educational service programs abroad, and student groups are continually engaged in community action with regard to numerous causes. Our student athletes are important ambassadors for Concordia and serve communities near and far with their volunteer efforts, as do participants in other campus sponsored programs.

Recently, Concordia formalized its commitment to academic excellence and civic action through the establishment of three strategic initiatives reflective of our institutional values: Sustainability, Diversity and Inclusion, and Integrative Learning. Through these initiatives, as well as a recently expanded dedication to interfaith dialogue, Concordia has created and reorganized administrative roles and has altered institutional practices. We have invited dialogue from within and outside of our campus and implemented the ideas which have been their result.

It has been the strategy of the of Civic Action Plan committee to create a plan which supports these initiatives and promotes responsible engagement with our surrounding community and wider world. In

order to do so, the committee held focus groups with faculty, staff, and students regarding current practices related to civic and community engagement at Concordia, as well as strengths, needs, and concerns held by members of our campus community when it comes to expanding our civic purposes.

Concordia's adoption of PEAK requirements, which were implemented beginning in the 2017-18 academic year, played a significant role in determining the direction of our research and the goals of our Civic Action Plan. Because PEAK requires community-integrated learning and can be applied to experiences which promote aspects of our strategic initiatives such as interfaith dialogue or social, economic, and environmental sustainability, we felt that curriculum offered important opportunities for research and support for civic engagement; hence, much of our time spent in focus groups with faculty and students was devoted to teaching and learning topics. Collaboration with representatives of Concordia's other strategic initiatives and the findings of an independent committee researching campus members' experiences of and recommendations for promoting diversity and inclusion have also influenced this work significantly.

#### INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through a campus-wide survey and several focus groups, we learned that Concordia College is extraordinarily active in its provision of community-based learning and service opportunities and that many innovative research, practical, and service projects take place on and off our campus each semester, usually involving collaboration with local civic and nonprofit organization. We also learned that faculty are enthusiastic about promoting civic education amongst their students and in partnering with community organizations for a variety of purposes. Furthermore, we learned that students consider community engagement essential to what it means to be a Cobber. Many faculty, staff, and students bring this ethos to their individual commitments to community service and activism as well.

The level of community engagement which has become a norm for many programs and classes across our college is a point of pride for faculty but is also related to concerns. For the most part, faculty who supervise internships, engage classes in community-based projects, and otherwise utilize community partnerships rely upon their own social and professional networks to do so. Faculty worry about taxing these relationships with frequent requests for collaboration, especially in light of Concordia's new PEAK requirement which could prompt instructors who have not previously utilized community contexts for their teaching to overwhelm these contacts with new requests.

Other concerns regarding community-engaged curricula include the possibility of duplicating the assignments of others due to a lack of communication regarding such projects across the college. Faculty who are less engaged in community-based integrative learning, at the same time, express the need for assistance in making connections with community partners and devising experiences that are valuable to students in their fields and useful to outside organizations.

Faculty also discussed the importance of preparing students for responsible engagement in community-based assignments. Some research participants discussed the importance of integrating community-based projects into the curricula in pedagogically sound ways. They desire ongoing department-level and campus-wide discussions and training in regard to topics such as the timing and place of civic education within the classroom, the acquisition of professional and interpersonal skills leading up to community-based projects, potential collaborations across disciplines, opportunities to create projects directly related to our

strategic initiatives, and the various goals and purposes of such assignments - including research, practicum, and service. Many faculty express a desire for ongoing faculty development resources with regard to these and other goals related to integrative learning and describe concerns for the time it will take them to independently plan and create civically active projects for their students.

In the same vein, many faculty and administrative staff who participated in our focus groups and who have worked with students in community-based projects in the past discussed the importance of framing and later reflection when it comes to service projects in particular, whether part of a class or not. Current models of service in academic and voluntary contexts are evolving to emphasize democratic collaboration rather than older and often paternalistic models of service (.e.g. the "white savior complex"). Since conducting our focus groups, faculty in the Office of Ministry has suggested the ELCA's "Model of Accompaniment" as a valuable framework for guiding projects and reflection. Associated values within this model are mutuality, vulnerability, empowerment, and sustainability.

Faculty and staff focus groups upheld a number of established programs and practices as models of successful civic engagement and discussed ways of enhancing these to accomplish greater visibility, community integration, and deeper student engagement. Examples include our Martin Luther King Day observation, which includes a campus in-service day devoted to speakers and workshops, and our Hands for Change Day, which engages incoming freshmen in two-hour service projects across dozens of area non-profits prior to the start of the fall semester.

Participants in our student focus group expressed a similar combination of enthusiasm for community engagement, pride in many current practices, and some areas of concern. Participants felt affinity with our institutional identity around BREWing beginning with their Hands for Change projects and continuing in community-based projects in courses, in athletics, and in student groups. Concern for these participants was mainly related to the time and energy required to meet the expectations of carrying a full courseload, participating in activities and clubs, and working a part-time job. Participants say they would like integrative learning projects to be personally meaningful, relevant to their course of study, and unique across the curriculum. They would like for faculty to be aware of the additive demands of integrative learning across classes and to utilize attendance hours when assigning community-based projects. Finally, they discussed limitations related to transportation, interpersonal skills, mental health, and disability and emphasized the need for instructors to take students' diverse needs into account when planning and evaluating community-engaged assignments.

Two other focus groups with athletics, administrative, and support staff emphasized the significant theme of communication. Concordia's athletics programs are important ambassadors for Concordia due to their volunteer projects involving youth, charitable causes, and our own fundraising goals. Student athletes are required to dedicate several hours to community and campus service each semester, and our athletic programs invite others to contribute to these causes and attend related events as well. Athletics staff express a desire for the campus community to be more aware of these voluntary activities and of opportunities to show support or be directly involved.

## **FARGO-MOORHEAD**

#### OUR COMMUNITY IN CONTEXT

Fargo-Moorhead is home to over 160,000 residents, three bachelor's degree granting institutions, and many nonprofit organizations. As the largest metropolitan area in the region, Fargo-Moorhead is a hub for education, culture, employment, and public resources. Accompanying these distinctions are many social needs and deficits, representing opportunities for civic engagement.

#### COMMUNITY RESEARCH FINDINGS

A subgroup of the Civic Action Plan Committee held three focus groups and many individual conversations with representatives of local initiatives and nonprofits which address issues like homelessness, food insecurity, educational inequality, refugee resettlement, and aging. These focus group participants helped the committee to ascertain the scope and nature of our community's needs. Participants also described their own organizations' particular needs and desires for collaboration with student groups. They shared assessments, too, of their past experiences and recommendations for improving collaboration in the future.

Participants outlined a number of projects with which college students could assist and, in some cases, identified particular disciplines which could assist with these initiatives. Organizations addressing homelessness, for instance, described needs ranging from enrichment for school-aged children to education and support surrounding health and illness. A representative from a food pantry discussed a particular need for dietetic support given that the organization does not have a registered dietician on staff. Others affiliated with housing and food needs in Fargo-Moorhead discussed the need for research, education, and stigma mitigation with regard to opioid dependence in our area and other forms of substance abuse which affect homeless populations disproportionately.

Focus group participants representing a local elementary school, a parent education initiative, a foster care program, a refugee resettlement program, and programs for aging populations described general and on-going needs for volunteer support. Many cited past and current internships and class collaborations as helpful in meeting ever-changing but ongoing needs, including organizing events, developing curricula, conducting institutional and community research, and even helping with the coordination of volunteers. Most every participant agreed that this latter task is very difficult for non-profits and that, while crucial to their operations, can be impossible unless partner organizations initiate contact, collaborate with the nonprofit to determine projects, provide leadership, and ensure that student volunteers are equipped with professional competencies and appropriate skills.

Participants were, by and large, very positive about their past encounters with Concordia students and emphasized a desire for more collaboration. While no participant recounted negative experiences with Concordia students in particular, they highlights challenges that sometimes arise when accommodating internships and course projects. These include formulating projects without consulting the organization about its true needs and goals, working with students who lack necessary interpersonal and professional skills, and, relatedly, encountering students who view volunteer work as unimportant and non-essential to the organization that has come to rely on them.

# **OUR PLAN OF ACTION**

### GOALS, STRATEGIES, TIMELINE, AND ASSESSSMENT

Informed by the intensive schedule of institutional and community research whose findings are outlined above, Concordia's Civic Action Plan combines the college's strengths and commitments with areas of need related to the significant themes of enhanced infrastructural support, community partnerships, civic education, and communication. Its specific goals, along with means of accomplishing and assessing each, are as follows:

### GOAL 1

Build and maintain cooperative partnerships with groups and organizations in our community

- 1. **Create an Office of Community Engagement** to serve as a resource and hub for connecting faculty, staff, and students with community organizations in research, service, and internships.
  - + Who: Academic Affairs
  - + Timeline: Summer 2018
  - + Assessment: Track utilization and solicit feedback from faculty and community organizations
- 2. **Appoint an FTE Coordinator of Community Engagement** to develop and maintain effective community partnerships / community outreach, track off-campus engagement, oversee assessment and coordinate assessment efforts of community engagement, work with the Civic Engagement Committee to develop a definition of civic action, and ensure that community engagement projects are in line with the College's strategic initiatives and ethical standards. This position will serve the entire campus community, but a significant component of their work will be in support of PEAKs.
  - + Who: Academic Affairs
  - + Timeline: Summer 2018
  - + Assessment: Position subject to periodic performance review
- 3. Appoint an Administrative Community Engagement/PEAK Assistant to track community engagement / IL / PEAKs across campus, help with outreach and maintaining community partnerships, handle logistics and maintain records for off-campus partnerships (including background checks and other pre-partnership arrangements, learning contracts, etc.), help administer IL and PEAK assessment, serve as tech support / liaison for IT services, and promote

civic and community action across campus.

+ Who: Academic Affairs

+ Timeline: Fall 2018

+ Assessment: Position subject to periodic performance review

- 4. **Appoint a Civic Engagement Committee** with faculty and staff representatives from each of our strategic initiatives—e.g. Sustainability, Diversity and Inclusion, PEAK, Interfaith Dialogue, and Global Education—as well as faculty knowledgeable in best practices for ethical civic engagement. The committee will promote ongoing partnerships that correspond to our strategic initiatives and reflect our values as an institution, and it will also help to identify local, regional, and global groups and sites for long-term engagement in research, service, and internships.
  - + Who: Civic Action Plan Committee
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018
  - + Assessment: Partnerships subject to ongoing assessment by student, faculty, and staff collaborators as well as populations served

## GOAL 2

Promote civic education, the cultivation of civic skills, responsible community engagement, and self reflection across the curriculum and the college

- 1. **Analyze our institution's infrastructure** in order to discern where activity that creates, promotes, and fosters civic engagement opportunities is currently taking place.
  - + Who: Civic Engagement Committee
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018
- 2. **Assist departments** in identifying where integrative learning fits in the curricula and promote the layering of integrative learning strategies, civic education, and reflection throughout the curriculum.
  - + Who: Office of Community Engagement
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018—ongoing
  - + Assessment: Possible voluntary addition to teaching evaluation for courses emphasizing these skills.
- 3. **Develop guidelines for offering PEAK courses** proportionate for curricular needs and mindful of faculty and student time.

- + Who: Integrative Learning Committee
- + Timeline: Fall 2018—ongoing
- + Assessment: Variable based on departmental decisions
- 4. **Provide ongoing curricular support through workshops and one-on-one assistance** to faculty engaging in community based projects and/or classroom based integrative learning and civic education.
  - + Who: Integrative Learning Committee
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018—ongoing
  - + Assessment: Variable based on departmental decisions
- 5. Use our annual MLK Day activities to highlight the products of integrative learning partnerships centered on social justice and diversity and inclusion goals; promote our MLK Day celebration as a community event.
  - + Who: Office of Student Engagement and the Office of Community Engagement
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018
  - + Assessment: Solicit voluntary feedback from community members in attendance
- 6. **Use our annual Celebration of Student Scholarship to promote community engagement** and disseminate information about community-based scholarship.
  - + Who: Director of Undergraduate Research and the Office of Community Engagement
  - + Timeline: Spring 2019—ongoing
  - + Assessment: Track frequency and include these projects in assessment for award consideration

## GOAL 3

Prepare students for lives of responsible citizenship and conscientious vocational practices

- 1. **Provide leadership development groups and promote opportunities for leadership** through global service learning and local community development initiatives.
  - + Who: Civic Engagement Committee
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018
  - + Assessment: Track rates of participation and solicit feedback

- 2. **Reevaluate our daily academic calendar** to allow students and faculty time for community-based projects as well as time for our campus to come together as a community.
  - + Who: Faculty senate, with administrative cooperation
  - + Timeline: Fall 2019
- 3. **Emphasize PEAKs as opportunities** for civic education and action through community-based projects.
  - + Who: Office of Community Engagement and Director of Integrative Learning
  - + Assessment: Review handbook descriptions and other overviews and promotions of PEAK

### GOAL 4

Promote ethical, democratic, and just community engagement strategies

- 1. **Establish and enforce best practices guidelines** that are pedagogically sound and evidence-based.
  - + Who: Office of Community Engagement, Integrative Learning Director, Civic Engagement Committee, and Minister for Faith and Spirituality in Action
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018
  - + Assessment: Periodic evaluation by appropriate programs and representatives, such as Social Work and Concordia's Minister for Faith and Spirituality in Action
- 2. **Support the establishment and/or promotion of visible centers, services, and supports** for diverse students, faculty, and staff on our campus.
  - + Who: Many examples of this work underway: e.g. Chief Diversity Officer, Office of Community Engagement, Global Education promoting PEAK Portal seminars, Office of Student Success
  - + Timeline: Spring 2019
- 3. Support the establishment of and/or promotion of visible efforts to welcome our neighbors and community onto our campus for events, groups, and services.
  - + Who: MLK Day planners, Ministry Events staff, Representatives of Strategic Initiatives, and related community partners
  - + Timeline: Fall 2018—ongoing
- 4. Evaluate current criteria for U and G courses and implement updates.
  - + Who: Core Committee, faculty, and the Office of Diversity
  - + Timeline: Ongoing

## GOAL 5

Value and uphold the civic engagement work of our campus community and make space on our campus for engagement with our wider community

- 1. **Service News will appear on CobberNet** to highlight individuals and community based projects as well as volunteer requests
  - + Who: Office of Community Engagement and Web Administrators
  - + Timeline: Fall 2019
- 2. **Acknowledge faculty's community-based projects as scholarship** in decision-making about tenure and promotion.
  - + Who: PT&E
  - + Timeline: Fall 2019

