



State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Statement on Civic Engagement

Civic engagement [is] an array of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, and behaviors that in combination allow individuals to contribute to the civic life of their communities. It may include, among other things, exploration of one's role and responsibilities in society; knowledge of and ability to engage with political systems and processes; and/or course-based or extra-curricular efforts to identify and address issues of public or community concern.

~ Policy on Student Learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education

Preparing students for active and effective citizenship has never been more important. The challenges of our modern world are complex, and they affect our local, regional, national, and global communities in a variety of ways. Responding effectively to these challenges demands a considerable array of abilities, bases of knowledge, and habits of mind, as well as affective qualities such as empathy and commitment to acting beyond one's own self-interests. Institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to help students develop and apply these traits and abilities, and in fact, they have been doing so for generations through both implicit and explicit means.

The SCHEV Policy on Quality and Assessment of Undergraduate Education names civic engagement as a core competency in order to emphasize the vital importance of the work colleges have already been doing in this area, and to encourage institutions to think in a more focused and deliberate manner about how they are preparing students to become better citizens. Civic engagement is too important an outcome to be left to chance.

"Civic engagement" is a broad term, as evidenced by the description in the SCHEV policy quoted above. Different terms are often used to capture this and other closely related constructs (e.g., civic learning, active citizenship, community engagement). Whatever language an institution uses, SCHEV's primary concern is that all institutions make a purposeful effort to prepare students to understand their roles, rights and responsibilities as members of the various communities they inhabit (and will inhabit), and to live out those roles in accordance with their own values.

Civic engagement is not limited to a particular political ideology, and it may be realized in both political and non-political ways. Although active participation is an important and visible expression of civic-mindedness, there is more to civic engagement than direct service or action. It is equally important to equip students with the knowledge and skills to understand context and processes that factor into civic issues; to evaluate information and form reasoned opinions; to discuss controversial topics and manage differences of opinion in a civil and respectful manner; and to develop confidence in contributing their voices to civic issues that interest them.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to cultivating civic engagement. What matters is that institutions—regardless of their size, location or mission—attend thoughtfully to this vital aspect of student learning, and that they embed civic engagement into their institutional values and programs in ways that are meaningful to them and appropriate to the students they serve.