

Civic Engagement Scholars Program

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Project Summary

The Civic Engagement Scholars Program was conceived to foster ideals of active citizenship among our undergraduate and graduate students, engaging the next generation of leaders on issues that are of import to our campus and the surrounding communities of Isla Vista, Goleta, and Santa Barbara and under the belief that students need a firm foundation in the principles of engaged citizenship to become effective community leaders.

To that end, we created alliances with leaders and organizations in those communities to provide students with opportunities to develop their leadership and organizing skills and to affect measurable, positive change. Students learned about the principles of active citizenship, emphasizing free speech and civil discourse. This second year, we incorporated parts of the Constructive Dialogue curriculum, which was very well received by the students. The class also featured guest speakers who led students in conversations on related topics. Guest speakers included nationally and locally recognized experts and community leaders in student activism, mental health, basic needs, the houseless, people with different abilities, sexual assault, mentoring disaster response, and local politics.

Based on the first year's outcomes, this academic year we concentrated on strengthening the longevity and impact of class projects. To that end, we encouraged multi-member groups versus single-student projects, and connected them to local nonprofits and agencies that expressed their need for support in the expansion and/or addition of initiatives that would significantly advance their mission and programs.

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Nonprofits this year included:

- The Good Samaritan & SB Action Network: farming, culinary arts, and food distribution training for the houseless, as a way of providing jobs and the opportunity to move to permanent housing
- Undocumented Student Services for mixed status students
- Constructive Dialogues curriculum development
- Santa Barbara Alternatives to Violence Project: workshops for reducing interpersonal violence (mainly in high-schools), for the development of leadership skills for teens to prevent violence.
- Youthwell, offers prevention and early intervention programs focused on mental health and wellness education, outreach, and improving access to coordinated care for youth through age 25 and their families by mobilizing community stakeholders in order to fill the gaps and remove barriers to services
- Sea League: addresses the lack of participation of communities of color in water sports and the fact that a large number cannot even swim. It also addresses our impact on the natural world through the power of play
- UC Disaster Resilience Network: Dean's Disaster Resilience Fellows program a launchpad for faculty, students, and staff to address the threats that disasters and crises pose to society.

From everything mentioned above, we believe our project's objectives were met and, in some cases, exceeded. First, students were encouraged to actively participate in community projects, and thus start to break down the artificial disconnect between the campus and the community and to increase trust and collaboration. Second, the program addressed several barriers that prevent students from becoming active in the civic life of their communities, including a common lack of understanding of pressing socio-political issues; under-developed skills of reasoning and persuasion; a dearth of positive role models; and the increasing incivility that characterize public life. Third, CESP emphasized the importance of working through differences across political and social divides and how to be good citizens while building consensus and cooperation in our communities.

The Civic Engagement Scholars Program was rewarding in terms of the variety and depth of issues addressed by our amazing speakers and the students' engagement with them. Students actively participated in the discussions, bringing up pressing needs of different communities and suggesting solutions they could work on as engaged citizens.

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Guest speakers representing a variety of government, local and non-profit organizations in the community (council members, county supervisors, mental health organizations, to name a few):

- Emeritus Professor Richard Flacks, expert in student movements and activism
- The Isla Vista Community Services District board of directors
- Katie Maynard, Food Security and Basic Needs Taskforce and Sustainability, UCSB
- Oscar Gutiérrez, Council Member, District 3, Santa Barbara and Gabe Escobedo, Planning Commissioner and candidate for the Santa Barbara Unified School District Board (now in office)
- Rachael Steidl, Executive Director, Youthwell volunteering and mental health
- Melissa Ortiz, Coordinator, Underground Scholars Program, UCSB
- Brianna Conway-Miller on Sexual Assault, Director, Campus Advocacy Resources & Education, UCSB
- The UC Disaster Resilience Network
- Professor Greg Johnson, Director of the Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life, UCSB
- Hugo Santos-Gomez, PhD, Soccer, Farmworkers, and Civic Engagement
- Michelle Deutchman, Executive Director of the University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement on the Constitutional principles of free speech; hate speech
- Professor Tania Israel on Meaningful Dialogue across Differences, Counseling, Clinical, and School of Psychology, UCSB
- Spencer Pritchard and Meikko Lee, Berkeley High School on mentoring

In CESP's first year, students worked individually or in groups on issues of their interest, either on campus or in the community. They presented a wide variety of one-time events and workshops with attendees including UCSB students, staff, and faculty, as well community members and Isla Vista youth. This year, students worked with community non-profits developing or expanding new components of the organization. Therefore, there was not a face to face interaction with an audience, except for the group who developed a powerful workshop on Constructive Dialogue.

This group presented two workshops. The first one was during a Student Initiated Outreach Program, Latine College Day, organized by El Congreso, one of our Registered Campus Organizations. This program brought 350 first-generation, low income high school students from Santa Barbara and Los Angeles to UCSB to

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participate in workshops and activities on college attendance, application, and financial aid. The workshop was presented at 3 different concurrent sessions. The second workshop took place at the St. George Youth Center in Isla Vista. The attendance was junior high and high school students, mainly Latinx.

For the rest of the projects, although there was not a physical audience, the projects reached a more diverse and larger audience than a one-time event, considering that many of them are long-term services and/or programs. The demographics of the beneficiaries of services through these organizations included the houseless; youth 12-25 years old interested in mental health resources; first-generation, low income high-school students in the Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles counties; undocumented UCSB students in mixed status families; youth in the criminal justice system; and friends and families of some of these youth. In terms of ethnicity, there was a mix of Latinx, Black, Asian American, and White individuals.

Since the Civic Engagement Scholars Program had two components, an academic course plus programs developed in local non-profits, there really were two types of audiences: the students attending the class and the audience or beneficiaries of the projects and services offered, developed or expanded, by the students. The students taking the class were all undergraduates of varied backgrounds: Latinx, White, Black, Asian, and an international student.

The 2022-2023 VOICE funding was used to buy the required books for the course: *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* by Kouzes & Posner, *How to Have Meaningful Dialogues Despite Political Differences* by Tania Israel, and *Isla Vista, a Citizens History* by Carmen Lodise & Friends. The fourth required book, *Free Speech on Campus* by Chemerinsky and Gillman, was provided to us for free. Other items funded included speaker fees for presenters, as well as parking permits. A small portion of the funds was used to pay for costs of the student projects like materials, supplies, printing, refreshments, and attendees' incentives/prizes.

Impacts

The Civic Engagement Scholars Program, in its second year, continued fostering community in at least three discrete ways. First, by allowing UC Santa Barbara students to be active participants in community projects and initiatives, we are starting to break

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down the artificial barrier that exists between the campus and the community and to increase trust and collaboration between them. The program addressed several of the barriers that prevent students from becoming active participants in the civic life of their communities, especially after coming back from remote learning. The content and activities of the class also helped students develop skills of reasoning and persuasion, through engaging in constructive dialogue and leadership development. Third, the program has empowered students to reach out to our local community to work together to solve the most pressing social issues of our time. A good example is the class requirement to engage in experiential activities and write a reflection about them. Some of those activities included attendance to meetings of the City of Goleta Council, City of Santa Barbara Council, the Santa Barbara Unified School District board, the Isla Vista Community Services District, and the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District, to name a few. Students also learned to engage in civil dialogue about often sensitive or contentious topics and to work with people from various backgrounds and of divergent viewpoints thoughtfully and constructively. CESP emphasized the importance of working through differences across political and social divides and how to be good citizens while building consensus and cooperation in our communities.